

# **A brief review of policy and practice for careers education**

## **Careers in Construction research for CITB**

**Emma Pollard, Kate Alexander, Claudia Plowden Roberts, Arundhati  
Dave, Louisa Illidge, Daniel Mason**

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# Summary

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The construction sector faces an ongoing skills shortage in the UK. This is exacerbated by negative perceptions of construction careers and the sector as a place to work, narrow horizons among potential entrants ruling construction out of their career options, the changing nature of work in construction, changing work practices and skills required, challenges attracting individuals to change sectors, and poor retention in the sector. These influence the extent to which the sector can improve its supply of labour and skills to meet its needs. The CITB has therefore identified several new groups to engage with to support careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) in order to improve and broaden the future labour supply: those in early years (aged 3 to 5), those of primary school age and in early secondary school (aged 5 to 14), those on or considering vocational pathways, and those currently outside the labour market.

## Key findings: context

- The **careers system** in the UK is complex. There is not one system, as each nation has its own infrastructure and ambition, with different delivery mechanisms and different coverage or target groups. In addition, each system is in the process of change, to make improvements. This makes understanding what is going on, engaging with careers policy and practice, and working effectively with the careers infrastructure challenging as the system is fragmented and in flux. Looking to the future, there seems to be a desire for careers services (within each nation) to be unified and for all ages, joined up with other services and thus holistic, locally delivered and aligned with local priorities and needs, to have a stronger focus on high quality skills, training and work experience, to focus on good work as an outcome, and to improve access to all.
- There is limited hard impact evaluation evidence about **what works in career guidance** but arguably more evidence of good practice. Research indicates that tailored and one to one support and embedding careers work within broader learning can be particularly effective, and that employers play an important and complementary role. Employer interventions are an important form of career support and employers are a trusted source of information, particularly for younger individuals. Interventions can broaden awareness of opportunities and raise aspirations, improve employability skills and networks, improve academic attainment and longer-term labour market outcomes. Employer interventions include linking employers with school children, linking employers with teaching staff, and employers offering meaningful work experiences.

## Key findings: working with new target groups

Engaging with **younger children** (in early years and primary settings) is important as these earliest years of life impact upon understanding and decision-making about the

world of work and gendered stereotypes about work are formed, which can subsequently be hard to break. At this age, parents and the media have a strong influence, so careers learning can be unintentional, unstructured and potentially ill-informed. Timing of engagement is critical, as interventions can be too late in the life course to influence subject choices, and in turn, possible career paths.

Working with younger children is about broadening career options, aspirations and possibilities, giving wider exposure to the world of work particularly for children from poorer backgrounds, and helping them to understand what skills and knowledge they may need to succeed (rather than guiding towards particular pathways, roles or qualifications). It is and should be different to what is delivered in secondary school settings. At present, there is no legal requirement for early years and primary education settings to provide careers support, and no specific resourcing to facilitate these endeavours. Working with younger children is therefore voluntary. Whereas an infrastructure has been developed and funded to support secondary school aged pupils across the UK nations, and in particular in England due to the legal requirement for schools and colleges in England to provide independent careers guidance for students aged 11 to 18 years old. This infrastructure places importance on and facilitates employer involvement. Engaging with younger children brings benefits but also has challenges.

- The benefits to starting early (at age 5 or earlier) with careers work with children are recognised by careers professionals and by teachers, and teachers tend to be positive and confident about career-related learning. The benefits are numerous including helping to bring about social mobility and social justice, particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Therefore, despite no legal requirement, career-related learning activity does take place in primary schools and the government is also funding pilot work in this area. However, at present little is known about what happens (if anything) in the early years sector.
- Career-related learning in primary settings tends to be organised by schools and led by teaching staff and delivered through PSHE (personal, social, health and economic education) lessons, topic work/projects or enterprise activities. Activity includes role play, jobs corners, discussing parents' jobs, curriculum linked activities, aspiration days, and enterprise days. Employers play a key role in supporting activities by offering career insight talks, workplace visits, mentoring and tutoring programmes and access to role models. Many career-related learning activities rely on volunteers from the world of work.
- Barriers to career-related learning include time constraints, costs and the lack of employer volunteers and challenges in communicating and scheduling teacher and employer interactions. Often, connections between employers and schools are informal and links can be lost when individuals move roles. To support primary schools there are resources, guides, programmes and projects to provide examples of activities and of good (effective) practice, and to train teachers to deliver curriculum linked activities and facilitate employer encounters. The latter involves connecting schools with role models and diverse workplace volunteers.

- Career-related learning in primary settings works best if personalised and relevant to the age group, involves a whole-school collaborative approach, is supported with good quality resources, has sufficient capacity to deliver (e.g. time, resources and training), is embedded in the curriculum, draws on partnerships and networks and involves employers for breadth and authenticity, and (where possible) involves parents. Looking to the future, a long-term nation-wide strategy is needed for young people and potentially a framework similar to the Gatsby benchmarks for older children, better careers education for teachers, greater promotion, support and regulation for work experience and employer encounters (for diversity, accessibility, quality and relevance), and more research to understand how background affects aspirations and how careers interventions affect different age groups. This requires action from government, but schools could be helped to see how existing resources can be tweaked to support these endeavours.

**Vocational pathways** have traditionally been associated with construction and vocational education and training (VET) has increasingly become a focus for government policy to tackle skills shortages and support social mobility. However, engaging those on or about VET pathways can be challenging given the confusion of and constant changes to provision and pathways, restricted access to and lack of diversity on some vocational pathways, dominance of and bias towards academic routes and lower awareness and relatively low take-up of vocational routes.

- In providing guidance *about* vocational pathways, it is important that people, particularly young people, are aware of all the opportunities open to them (without bias and with equal value of pathways) and this requires improvements to education and advice, as well as a stability in and a simplification of the VET system. The new Provider Access Legislation (PAL) aspect to the careers duty in secondary schools will help, requiring students to be given greater and meaningful exposure to VET providers which will boost awareness, help with parity of esteem for VET, allow young people to make more informed career choices and decisions and reduce drop-out. Schools and colleges can access support to fulfil their PAL duty and specialist organisations can also provide guidance and support to raise awareness of and improve access to VET with: CPD for staff; resources for students including posters, videos, case studies, subject guides and preparing for work experience guides; and activities for students such as awareness assemblies, apprenticeship application workshops, mock interviews and assessment centres, and careers fairs.
- Employers can also provide support through outreach activities such as virtual events, school visits, attending careers fairs, mentoring, employability days, acting as sector ambassadors and offering work experience and industry placements; and through developing general marketing materials and social media content to reflect and promote the diversity of sectors. Employers need to be mindful of students' fatigue with virtual interactions, needing to work around school timings, and being aware of school context to tailor their material. Employers' input and activities are often developed and delivered in collaboration with other (specialist) organisations, and these organisations can also support employers with widening their recruitment to vocational entrants.

- In providing guidance to those on vocational pathways, research indicates that older learners (over 18) and those learning with independent training providers may not be receiving career guidance as they are not covered by the statutory duty. They may not understand the opportunities available in the careers they are interested in or lack awareness of options outside their current pathway or employer. The Department for Education (DfE) encourages providers to follow the statutory guidance (Gatsby benchmarks) and research finds that training providers do undertake career guidance activities, but this is often inconsistent, fragmented and not prioritised (as providers can be wary of upsetting employers). Where career guidance does happen, it can be provided as a standalone subject, as part of the subject curriculum/vocational programme or via extra-curricular activities; and it can be provided by their learning/training provider or their employer or through their placement. This can mean that the distinction between careers guidance and vocational curriculum can be blurred and be limited to the current role and current employer. It can also depend on the industry expertise of staff and their links to sectors (which can quickly become out of date).
- There are efforts to support colleges, training providers and employers to develop careers provision for VET students. Much of this is focused on apprentices. This outlines good practice for employers, which involves supporting personal and career development beyond the apprenticeship role (information about career prospects and engaging in next step conversations, mentoring/buddying, additional training) and exposure to wider experiences beyond the role (information and experiences of different roles, different site visits, shadowing different roles, meeting clients and suppliers, attending trade events/membership of trade bodies). Employers can also help by keeping college and provider staff up to date with the industry. DfE have also been working to help ensure students, parents and employers are clear about progression opportunities from VET and to help providers to advise their VET students about options for progression.

**Adults outside the labour market** are a large group and growing in number and thus creating concerns for government (as falling labour market participation negatively affects economic recovery and growth). This group are generally referred to as 'economically inactive' as they are not in work and either not seeking work or unable to work, yet could be a potential source of labour and skills for the construction sector. This group is highly diverse, faces complex, multiple and often very-individualised barriers to accessing work, and are difficult to identify and reach. This is reflected in the wide and confusing range of services that attempt to target them but by no means reaches all, such as employment support, education and skills support, employer/workplace support and broad-based support (including careers focused activities). Those outside the labour market are often confused or conflated with those who are classed as unemployed (i.e. those not in work but looking for work), this group are different and include: those who last worked several years ago or have never worked (so will have limited or diminishing human and social capital), students, young people who are not in employment, education or training (referred to as young people NEET), those with caring responsibilities, disabled people and those with long-term health conditions, and those who have retired (often retiring early). Together, these individuals encompass those who are interested in work but also

those who will not want to or feel able to work and thus will be difficult to bring back into the labour market.

- Working with adults outside the labour market and particularly knowing who and how to help is challenging for three key reasons: the role of employers is harder to identify than when working with those in the education system; potential adults to target are harder to identify and access given their diversity, dispersion and distance from the labour market; and working with the existing careers infrastructure(s) is difficult given the fragmented nature (across and within the UK) and current state of flux.
- Career guidance for adults tends to take place within employment support and thus is employment focused, but has been found to be inconsistent, fragmented, lacking cohesion and unclear to users, involve multiple stakeholders with no common thread of activity/coordination, focused on targets and short-term outcomes resulting in limited access to personalised and tailored support, and lacking in highly qualified staff. This means, despite career guidance being key in supporting adults outside the labour market back into work, few people are able to engage with it.
- The key mechanisms for careers guidance for adults (in England) include the National Careers Service and Jobcentre Plus but these tend to be focused on the unemployed and job-getting rather than providing (ongoing) careers guidance. Many adults who are economically inactive are outside of the benefits system (often actively choosing to be for example by retiring early, or having caring responsibilities) and so will be unaware of the services offered. This means adults may seek support elsewhere and fail to find what they need. Indeed, most adults out of work are not unemployed (i.e. not looking for work) and may not be on benefits, so support for these people is patchy and inconsistent (often provided through projects and programmes with a narrow remit and short-term funding).
- Understanding about good practice for adult guidance is evolving and delivering it is stymied by the current system, which needs improving and simplifying. However, good adult guidance involves: personalised, person-centred and holistic wrap-around support to help individuals overcome complex barriers and access good work; tailored career guidance (which requires time to understand people's needs and challenges); strong partnerships between services to provide joined-up support and accessibility; independent and impartial support with honest brokers (to source the support that is needed not just the support they can provide); local understanding and delivery; and services communicated and promoted to the wider adult population. Adult career guidance work should also aim to help employers be more inclusive and improve access to work for disadvantaged groups. However, adult guidance services working effectively with employers can be hampered by a lack of understanding of employer needs and how they work and limited awareness among employers of the support they can access, resulting in employers having to navigate the different systems and services available.

## Implications and recommendations

CITB recognises that, while the construction industry attracts workers, more are needed not just to replace those who leave but also to meet forecasted growth, and almost one third of employers struggle to find suitably skilled staff. This means more needs to be done to provide the industry with the workforce it needs for now and the for the future. One option is to increase the number of people joining (CITB, 2024). This could involve looking to broaden the recruitment pipeline to new groups.

A key priority area for CITB is therefore to inform and enable diverse and skilled people into construction by raising the profile of construction careers, and working with the industry to provide more flexible routes in. CITB is investing in a range of activities including Go Construct<sup>1</sup>, SkillBuild<sup>2</sup> and STEM Ambassadors<sup>3</sup>; work experience and work Tasters; Apprenticeships; New Entrant Support Team<sup>4</sup>; and Onsite Experience Hubs<sup>5</sup>. The Go Construct STEM Ambassadors programme is particularly important for CITB as it provides a direct way to engage with young people in schools. In 2023/24 the programme involved 1,539 industry professionals acting as ambassadors engaging with over 600 schools, with the majority of these engagements taking place in person rather than online<sup>6</sup>. Looking forwards to 2024/25 CITB will be researching how to support their ambassadors to deliver engagement activities, continuing to develop their resources for ambassadors including activities designed for working with different age groups in schools

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<sup>1</sup> Go Construct is a website providing information and resources around careers in construction and the built environment sector. It showcases the range of opportunities available. Go Construct is also a service which provides input to careers events and wider media. Go Construct is aimed at young people looking to start a career or more experienced people looking to change careers, those starting out in the industry or those considering where they want to work. See <https://www.goconstruct.org/about-go-construct/>

<sup>2</sup> SkillBuild is a multi-trade skills competition for construction trainees and apprentices. Each year it attracts over 1,000 registrations, holds regional heats and a final competition, and covers a range of construction trades. See <https://www.goconstruct.org/skillbuild/>

<sup>3</sup> Construction STEM Ambassadors are construction professionals who act as the face of the industry for young people, providing an introduction to the industry, bringing the industry to life, and they bridge the link between studying STEM subjects and a career in construction for young people. They engage with young people in schools, workplaces, careers fairs and events; they can deliver talks, run stands at careers fairs, lead workshops, provide mentoring, and support teachers with developing curriculum resources. Schools and colleges can book a Go Construct STEM Ambassador to visit them. Construction STEM Ambassadors are part of the wider STEM Ambassador network, supported by STEM learning. See <https://www.goconstruct.org/get-started-in-construction/go-construct-stem-ambassadors/>

<sup>4</sup> New Entrant Support Team (NEST) supports employers with finding, recruiting and retaining new entrants, particularly apprentices. Support is provided with recruitment, paperwork, accessing grants and funding, and ongoing mentoring.

<sup>5</sup> Onsite Experience Hubs are designed to provide one-stop recruitment for construction employers – linking employers with training providers, local authorities, Local Employment Partnerships, and community agencies – to develop candidates and link them to employer's vacancies. See <https://www.citb.co.uk/levy-grants-and-funding/funded-projects/live-funded-projects/onsite-experience-hubs-england/>; and <https://www.citb.co.uk/levy-grants-and-funding/funded-projects/live-funded-projects/onsite-experience-hubs-wales/>

<sup>6</sup> Figures from an CITB internal document 2024, accessed September 2024

and colleges, providing access to physical activity kits, and promoting the programme through social media campaigns. CITB also aims to support careers leads in schools by providing careers information, advice and guidance, recognising that many careers guidance professionals want to know more about construction careers.

This review identifies areas of focus for CITB moving forwards, many of which align with current and planned activities especially those of the Go Construct STEM Ambassadors programme. These could be more widely communicated to both young people, schools and employers, particularly smaller employers; and could be reviewed to explore the potential to extend their influence to wider groups of potential entrants and thus provide a solid foundation to build upon. However, this review also indicates potential new activities and/or where ambitions could be raised even higher.

**Engaging young children:** Employers are key to providing breadth and authenticity to career-related learning in primary settings but schools struggle to find and access employers. The sector should harness opportunities to be involved in formal career-related learning with younger children to help them understand a broader range of roles and sectors, and tackle/head off any misconceptions and gendered stereotypes about construction. This could happen alongside maintaining a classroom presence in secondary schools and colleges through visits, role models, and delivering careers sessions; plus improvements in efforts to offer meaningful work experience for older pupils and also for teachers; and (following the lead of other sectors) developing careers education content for teachers to understand subject relevant career pathways and see how subject knowledge is applied in construction. There are key organisations that offer support, programmes, guides and other resources including the Careers & Enterprise Company in England, Founders4schools and Career Ready.

### CITB could:

1. Raise the importance of employers engaging with schools and encourage involvement
2. Produce a resource guide for employers to raise awareness of the tools, initiatives and organisations available to support employers working with schools, careers leaders, teachers and pupils. This could include ideas and examples of how to get involved, personal testimonies from construction employers about their experiences, and signposts to useful organisations.
3. Help employers form partnerships to collaborate and deliver construction sector career activities.
4. Advocate for change to extend formal career-related learning into primary settings, and advocate and support further research on career-related learning within early years settings.

**Engaging with vocational learners:** Employer outreach activities help raise the profile of vocational pathways and employers may feel more comfortable working with older students. The sector should harness opportunities to raise awareness of and promote VET pathways and qualifications particularly to under-represented groups such as women. Employers also play a critical role in exposing those on vocational pathways to information about careers opportunities through the work trainees engage in and via work

placements for college-based learners. Sector employers along with learning providers (supported by government policy) should work to improve the experiences of vocational training such as apprenticeships and T levels to tackle high rates of drop out, this could include offering better salary and support and confidence for assessments; and offering wider insights into pathways and roles. There may also be opportunities for employers to come together to provide greater stability for apprentices, so they can complete their training (across multiple projects or employers). There are key organisations that offer support and resources for employers, and can help employers develop their own resources, including Careers & Enterprise Company's Career Hubs, the Apprenticeship Support and Knowledge (ASK) programme, Amazing Apprenticeships, IfATE<sup>7</sup>, and DfE's employer engagement teams including the T level employer ambassador network.

**CITB could:**

5. Provide support for employers in engaging with standalone careers activities such as careers fairs and mentoring programmes, on providing meaningful encounters for college-based learners in practice, and on offering wider insights (beyond the current role, department or employer) in the workplace to show breadth of prospects and pathways, including facilitating and creating networks for employers to visit other sites and working environments.
6. Produce guidance and share best practice on outreach activities, particularly on how to overcome challenges with arranging in-person workplace visits, working with school timetables and tailoring input to school and learner needs.
7. Produce a guide for employers of organisations offering support and facilitate partnerships for employers to provide sector specific information, case studies and resources for colleges and providers, and facilitate engagement in networks such as the Apprenticeship Ambassador Network.
8. Support the sector to work with provider staff to keep their sector knowledge and links current through offering visits, industry days and in supporting curriculum materials focused on construction.

**Engaging with economically inactive adults:** Working to support and engage adults outside the labour market is challenging but there are opportunities to help improve the current system and shape the new system. There is a need to improve understanding in the sector of potential target groups and the barriers faced, and harness opportunities to address these barriers including supporting youth initiatives to align with the green or digital agenda (important areas for construction), and working to make construction workplaces more accessible and inclusive including implementing more flexible working and contracts, thinking about the practicalities of recruitment.

<sup>7</sup> Since writing the report, a new government has been elected and has announced that IfATE responsibilities will transfer to a new body 'Skills England'.

**CITB could:**

9. Help employers and the sector more broadly work with the National Careers Service to ensure it has up to date information about career pathways into and within the construction industry (reflecting changing skills needs and technologies).
10. Help employers to work with local service providers to improve their understanding of local skills needs and (where possible) input into Local Skills Improvement Plans.
11. Develop a guide for employers to raise awareness of national employment support programmes and projects that provide opportunities for employers to engage with adults.
12. Promote the business case for making workplaces more accessible and inclusive and how this can be achieved, and collate and maintain a directory of support and funding for employers to help them be more inclusive in their approaches to recruitment, retention and progression.
13. Encourage employers to research and share information about local providers, programmes and projects which could help them engage with a wider group of adults and deliver diversity of their intake.

# 1 Introduction

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Note to reader: The process of gathering and reviewing the literature for this report was undertaken during the previous (Conservative) administration. At the time of writing this report in October 2024, the incoming (Labour) Government is developing plans for career education and guidance, but little detail has been published to date. Labour has pledged to improve work experience for young people in schools and to increase the number of careers advisors in schools, to introduce a Youth Guarantee with access to training, to apprenticeships, or support to find work for all young people aged 18-21, and to bring together the National Careers Service and Jobcentre Plus into a national jobs and careers service.

CITB's strategy is to achieve noticeable, long-term and sustainable improvements in the supply of labour and skills to the construction industry and increase the diversity of the industry's workforce. CITB recognises that the industry does not have a sustainable source of labour to recruit from and therefore seeks to support the industry in attracting new talent. Changes in demographics, aspirations and expectations as well as the withdrawal from Europe have impacted on the industry's traditional sources of skills, and the supply of skills is at risk if the industry does not broaden who it recruits and retains.

The Careers in Construction research series explores attitudes to and awareness of the construction industry, and engagement or potential engagement with construction careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) and the construction sector more broadly. It provides robust and credible analysis and evidence to support the CITB to develop action plans and influence policymakers, employers and key decision-makers.

A key aim of the research is to provide a better understanding of alternative sources of labour for the construction sector to engage with, in order to improve and broaden the future labour supply. Specifically, the research focuses on four new audience groups who were identified as promising sources of entrants into construction, and aims to improve understanding of these groups, identify innovation and good practice supporting these groups with CEIAG and into the labour market, and to support improvement and progress among practitioners working with these groups. These groups are:

- early years (children aged 3-5 years);
- primary/early secondary years (young people aged 5-14 years);
- potential entrants into further education via vocational pathways; and
- potential entrants outside the labour market, including long-term unemployed, early retirees and those with health issues.

This report presents key findings from a brief and exploratory look at the literature (including research, reviews, commentary, and policy papers) covering the policies and

practices aimed at these four groups. It was not a full or exhaustive review. It sought to understand:

- what are challenges facing these groups, and the challenges in providing support for them?
- what is going on with regards to careers and employer/employment interventions, and with tackling stereotypes and broadening horizons?
- what do careers (related) policies, programmes and initiatives aim to do and how do they work?

## 2 Context and Challenges

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This chapter examines the challenges facing the construction sector and the challenges around engaging with the four new audience groups and in potentially supporting them with careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG). The aim of which would be to encourage these groups to consider a career in construction.

### 2.1 Issues facing the construction sector

The construction industry is facing an ongoing skills shortage in the UK. This is fuelled by four key challenges: negative perceptions and narrow horizons among potential entrants, the changing nature of work in construction and the skills required, challenges attracting individuals to change sectors, and poor retention in the sector.

- **Negative perceptions and narrow horizons:** There are persistent negative perceptions about construction work, construction careers are low status, trade careers involve hard physical work in poor weather conditions, tradeswomen are scarce and experience poor treatment, and construction as being a better career for men than women due to expectations around flexible working and better work-life balance, portable skill sets, and male dominated work cultures (Ryan et al, 2022; Francis and Prosser, 2012; Ette, 2016; on the tools; 2024). This is harming the industry's ability to attract, train and retain the skilled workforce it requires and is contributing to a skills gap, particularly for tradespeople (Ette, 2016; on the tools, 2024). Additionally, young people are encouraged to look at employment within the context of their own personal lives, interests and hobbies, including their family. This may mean that they are only engaging with careers that their friends and family are in, leading to narrow horizons (Francis and Prosser, 2012). Parents may not understand their role in narrowing or broadening horizons. For example, parents of daughters in primary school not understanding why careers educators wanted to talk to their children about construction (Research Base, 2021).
- **The changing nature of work and the skills required:** The increased use of digital technologies in construction has increased the need for technical skills and knowledge, which presents opportunities for the sector to challenge views of the work available and to be more inclusive of home workers, older workers and those with disabilities. However, existing construction workers may lack the skills needed for modern construction and feel pushed out of the sector (Work Foundation and City and Guilds Group, 2018). There are concerns that with an aging workforce and the dominance of micro-enterprises, the sector may not be able to meet the demands for new skills and replacement workers:

*'VET [vocational education and training] will likely struggle to meet the sector's future skill needs. VET stakeholders must continue developing initiatives to overcome the challenges raised by digitalisation, the green transition and the aging workforce. The challenge of equipping construction workers with the right skills will concern both initial and continuing VET stakeholders. Apprenticeships, a strong VET pathway for the sector, can support efforts of attracting more young and female learners.'* (Cedefop, 2023<sup>8</sup>).

- **Challenges in changing career:** As the core skills needed to work in construction change, the sector needs to acquire them through upskilling the existing workforce or attracting individuals with those skills from other industries which maybe unrelated to construction. The challenges here will include equipping these new workers with the relevant skills and knowledge required for the construction industry and making sure that jobs within construction are attractive to a wider audience (Work Foundation and City and Guilds Group, 2018).

Changing jobs is relatively common. On average 9% of people change jobs each year (ONS, 2019). It is most common among those in their early careers (aged 16 to 24 years old) and has become more common in recent years (2020 to 2022, after the COVID-19 pandemic). Changing jobs can involve switching industry, occupation and/or region, but ONS (2019) finds that most job changers switch jobs with the same skill level and region. The latest ONS (2022) statistics suggest that changing industry or occupation is linked to higher earnings growth (compared to those moving jobs within their sector etc or compared to those staying in their job), though not necessarily higher earnings per se. The ONS suggest this may be due to the skills and experience gained by staying in a job, the nature of more secure, longer-term employment and the age profile (i.e. older) of job stayers. Other research suggests that moving between sectors and careers can have financial consequences for individuals, in terms of substantial initial pay cuts and additional costs from retraining or gaining additional qualifications, which may not be manageable and thus deter career changing (Vaid and Evans, 2023). The ONS (2022) statistics indicate that this may be an issue for older individuals in particular, as those aged 50 or older on average see no earnings growth in changing jobs (not necessarily careers); and for those in elementary occupations or skilled trades occupations, where average earnings growth is low even when workers change jobs (and is higher if they stayed in their jobs).

Further analysis by the ONS (2022)<sup>9</sup> suggests the construction sector has strong financial incentives to stay within the sector, but perhaps little financial pull to enter from another sector. The analysis shows that construction sector workers staying in the same job between April 2020 and April 2021 saw an average earnings growth of

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/skills-developments-and-trends-construction>

<sup>9</sup> The ONS analysis uses the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE). This is an employer survey, so it is not possible to determine whether job moves are voluntary or involuntary. ASHE does not cover the self-employed, so the full range of construction sector workers is not represented. ONS analysis indicates 16.7% of construction workers in Great Britain (in 2022) were self-employed, and the sector had the highest level of self-employed jobs across the whole economy. See <https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/constructionindustry/articles/constructionstatistics/2022>

7% (the highest rate compared to all other sectors), whereas those changing jobs within the sector saw a rise of 17% (again this was one of the highest rates compared to other sectors). Those changing jobs to work outside of the construction sector saw an average earnings growth of 21% (one of the highest, just behind those moving out of accommodation and food service sector, which was particularly badly affected by the COVID-19 lockdowns). There is just a 4-percentage point difference between workers moving within the construction industry and moving outside of the construction industry which arguably doesn't create a strong incentive to leave construction. Conversely, those changing jobs to work in the construction sectors from another industry saw an earnings growth of 8%, this compares to higher average earnings growth for those moving into competitor sectors such as professional, scientific and technical activities (12%), IT (13%), and manufacturing (15%). Arguably this doesn't create a strong earnings incentive to move into construction.

- **Poor retention:** The sector faces issues retaining workers. Research suggests this is due to a lack of job stability and lack of career progression, and particularly impacts on those from ethnic minority backgrounds along with racism, discrimination and language barriers (Ahmed, 2018). Poor retention affects many sectors, yet construction appears to fare better than some others. Recent analysis by CIPD<sup>10</sup> (CIPD, 2024) shows the average turnover for UK workers is 34% (with most moving to a new employer rather than leaving the labour market), and the turnover rate in the construction sector is slightly higher than across all industries at 35% (similar to the rates for IT and health and social work). The sector with the highest turnover rate was accommodation and food services (52%), as noted this sector was particularly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic; followed by agriculture, forestry and fishing, and wholesale, retail and repair of vehicles. Also 57% of those in construction have been with their employer for at least 5 years, compared to an average 48% across all industries<sup>11</sup>.

These challenges reinforce the need for the sector to engage with potential employees at an earlier stage, to ensure they have the relevant and accurate knowledge about the industry and the jobs available, as well as the relevant skills and qualifications required now and in the future.

## 2.2 Issues facing early years and primary settings

There are a number of issues when thinking about engaging with early years and primary school aged children with careers, including recognising the importance of early career interventions, recognising and working to harness or counteract the influence of parents and the media, unequal exposure to the world of work, misalignment of aspiration and the labour market, and understanding the challenges to providing career-related learning in these settings.

<sup>10</sup> Using data from the Annual Population Survey, January 2022 to December 2023

<sup>11</sup> Using data from the Annual Population Survey, January 2023 to December 2023.

- **The importance of early career interventions:** The earliest years of life impact upon individuals' understanding and decision-making about the world of work, informal careers learning begins before school starts and gendered stereotypes about work are formed and are present at an early age (as early as age seven) which shape how children see jobs in the future (Hooley, 2021; Chambers et al, 2018; Chambers, 2020; Mordal et al, 2020). Early experiences shape how children see the world and ultimately shape their careers. By the end of primary school, children should have developed a self-image, life skills and considered what skills, knowledge and strengths they have; explored the world of education and work; and considered how school will influence their career development (Hooley, 2021).
- **Counteracting the influence of parents and the media:** There are multiple influencers on a child's career aspirations. In early and primary years these are mainly informal and include parents' careers and social backgrounds, and so careers learning tends to be unintentional or unstructured. A key study (Drawing the Future, Chambers et al, 2018) found 36% of primary school aged children (aged 7 to 11 in the UK) based their career aspirations on the people they know, 45% were influenced by TV, film and radio, and less than 1% knew about a job from someone visiting their school (Chambers et al, 2018). The authors noted how academic studies have shown that '*social background, personal networks, celebrity and mass media also have a role to play in forming ideas about what is reasonable and obtainable for 'people like me' to aspire to*' (p78). Informal exposure to the world of work can also lead to entrenchment of gender and class inequalities.
- **Unequal exposure to the world of work:** By the time children start primary school they may already have a narrow concept of career options and possibilities and once career aspirations are narrowed they are likely to remain so (Archer et al, 2013 referenced in Kashefpakdel et al, 2018). This is worse for children from poorer backgrounds and thus has implications for social mobility. Children from poorer backgrounds may have unequal exposure to the world of work and may not have access to successful role models and their aspirations may be limited as a result (Chambers et al, 2018; Mordal et al, 2020).
- **Misaligned aspirations:** The Drawing the Future study found a worrying and continuing disconnect between the aspirations of children and the predicted jobs of the future, for both primary-age children and young people in secondary schools, and that this is not confined to the UK but is a global issue (Chambers et al, 2018). This work followed on from 'Nothing in Common: The career aspirations of young Britons mapped against projected labour market demand (2010-2020)' (2013) which found that '*there was nothing in common between the aspirations of teenagers and the jobs that await them when they transition from school to work...it raised concern about the massive information gap between what young people know about the careers and opportunities open to them and the actual jobs that exist*' (Chambers et al, 2018, p7). The authors of the 2018 report note that for primary-age pupils in the UK: '*42% of children hold ambitions to secure just 2.4% of the new and replacement jobs projected to exist in the Culture, Media and Sports professions. While just over 1% of children have aspirations to one day have a job in the Business and public service industries, even though the sector is predicted to hold 8% share of the total UK jobs in 2024.*'

(p32, Chambers et al, 2018). The research also found that 61% of the career ambitions of those in primary schools fall into three broad occupational categories (out of 25) – culture, media and sports occupations, health professions, and science, engineering and technology professions. The report however concludes that ambition shouldn't be discouraged but young people should be helped to understand the wide array of other career options open to them, and the transferable skills they can gather in the pursuit of their dream job.

- **Understanding the challenges to providing career-related learning:** Education providers face challenges in offering careers education earlier, arguably the most pressing is the lack of available funding with government failing to designate specific funding to spend on careers education and related to this that careers education may not be seen as a priority (exacerbated by the lack of ring-fenced funding). Indeed, there is currently no mandatory nor formalised careers curriculum within primary schools. Additional challenges are:

- difficulties finding time for staff to provide careers sessions due to a lack of flexibility within already crowded timetables and heavy teacher workloads;
- primary schools tending not to have a specific coordinator for careers education;
- needing to keep up to date with developments in the world of work;
- difficulties developing relationships with and engaging with local businesses and employers;
- difficulties getting parents or guardians involved in supporting careers education (parents may not understand what careers education hopes to achieve and the importance of involving children at an early age); and
- the location/geography of the school which can limit access to careers learning opportunities (CITB, 2023; Kashefpakdel et al, 2018; Kashefpakdel et al, 2019; Research Base, 2021; Hughes and Hughes, 2022; Chambers et al, 2018, Millard et al, 2019).

Chambers et al (2018) found that exposing children to real-world examples is happening but argue the challenge is one of volume, and that the more career related activities a young person participates in the greater the impact on education and employment outcomes.

### 2.2.1 Implications for the construction sector

There clearly are opportunities for further work, by primary schools and employer partners, to influence aspirations and prevent gendered stereotypes from becoming established, and this presents opportunities for the construction sector, with support from CITB. These could build on and extend the programmes already developed by CITB including Go Construct STEM Ambassadors. Indeed, more formalised careers education in early years and in primary school settings plays an important role in providing children with equal access to information at an early age and provides children with a better understanding of a broad range of roles and sectors (rather than dissuade from certain professions) (Hooley, 2021).



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This could also help tackle persistent misconceptions around roles in the construction industry and particularly gendered stereotypes about construction, which are likely to embed at an early age.

The construction sector, however, needs to be mindful of the challenges education providers face in offering careers education to younger children, including the lack of specific funding, coordination, and staff time; but particularly difficulties finding and contacting local businesses and employers. The sector could consider ways to help support education providers in overcoming these challenges, including finding ways to make construction employers easier to access by schools.

## 2.3 Issues facing vocational pathways

Vocational and technical education covers a range of qualifications including basic skills through to continuing professional development (CPD), but notably includes apprenticeships (from intermediate apprenticeship/level 2 to degree apprenticeship/level 6 and 7<sup>12</sup>), traineeships, (more recently) T levels (one of the first of these was in construction)<sup>13</sup> and higher technical qualifications (Foundation Degrees, Higher National Certificates and Higher National Diplomas). Vocational pathways have traditionally been associated with construction and act as an important route to work and careers in the sector.

Vocational and technical qualifications provide an alternative pathway for young people and a second chance for adults to upskill or reskill. Vocational and technical education has become a key focus for government policy in recent years, in recognition of its importance in upskilling and reskilling the population to meet labour market needs and tackling skills shortages. It also acts as an important policy lever to support social mobility, bringing benefits to individuals as well as employers in terms of access to good quality work (Orlando, 2021). Vocational and technical provision has been heavily influenced by employers (particularly large firms) and arguably therefore is more closely aligned with employer skills needs (at least the needs of larger employers) and preparation for the labour market than other provision.

There are a number of issues when thinking about engaging those on vocational pathways in CEIAG, or in encouraging individuals to think about vocational pathways and careers, particularly young people. These include the dominance of academic routes and

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<sup>12</sup> Degree apprenticeships were first introduced in 2015 as a key element of reforms to the apprenticeship system, but development has been slower than originally expected see <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/7cd79cd8-536f-49e5-a55f-ebd83b344b16/dadfevaluation.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> T levels were introduced in September 2020 as an alternative to A levels and apprenticeships, offering a new educational pathway after GCSEs. They are equivalent to 3 A levels and offer a broader programme than apprenticeships (but based on the same employer-designed standards as apprenticeships). They are a two-year technical course and involve an in-depth industry placement (equivalent to 20% of the course). Construction was one of the first T levels introduced (alongside digital, education and childcare). See <https://www.tlevels.gov.uk/> or <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7951/>

relatively low take up of vocational pathways, confusion of provision and pathways, potentially lower returns, restricted access and a lack of diversity among participants.

■ **Dominance of academic routes:** The lack of parity between academic and vocational routes through education and training has underpinned policy and discussion around skills since the 1980s. Vocational pathways are viewed as more complex, offering a range of qualifications, with qualifications such as apprenticeships which may not be viewed as a proper achievement or seen as leading to a job with low security (Ryan et al, 2022). Traditional academic pathways are considered more straightforward, have a more structured approach to addressing skills needs, and lead to better income and career opportunities. Academic pathways continue to be held in higher esteem and prioritised by young people and their parents (Ryan et al, 2022). Although recent surveys suggest the tide may be turning. A small YouGov survey (2022<sup>14</sup>) found that apprenticeships<sup>15</sup> are viewed as at least as good or even better than university degrees for preparing young people for the future, and between one third and one half of parents of school-age children say they would prefer their child to take an apprenticeship rather than go to university<sup>16</sup>. DfE are concerned that fewer students are advised on technical education compared to academic routes (DfE, 2023), and students may not know how to apply for an apprenticeship or have any information about these programmes (Ryan et al, 2022).

■ **Low take up of (and retention on) vocational pathways:** The number of people engaging in vocational and technical education is low. Only 4% of young people begin apprenticeships after completion of GCSEs and a smaller proportion of the UK population holds higher technical qualifications compared to countries with similar economic contexts such as Germany and Canada (DfE, 2023).

Further statistics from DfE for England 2023/24<sup>17</sup> for **apprenticeships** show:

- Apprenticeship starts in 2023/24 were up 1.1% on the previous year to almost 280,000 (but this is still lower than in 2021/22). This includes 78,990 starters aged 19 to 24 (similar to the age of the majority of university entry), which is the lowest number of entrants in the past seven years. In contrast, there were 512,465 1<sup>st</sup> year enrolments to undergraduate study in England from those living in England<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> <https://yougov.co.uk/society/articles/42819-are-apprenticeships-better-university-degrees-youn>

<sup>15</sup> The research asks, 'which do you think prepares young people better for the future – a university degree or an apprenticeship?'. It does not define apprenticeships and thus does not distinguish level of apprenticeship so is likely to include degree apprenticeship. The sample size was 1993 adults.

<sup>16</sup> The research asks, 'if you had to choose which would you prefer for your own child at the age of 18, would you prefer them to study for a university degree or an apprenticeship?', again apprenticeship is not defined and does not distinguish level of apprenticeship so is likely to include degree apprenticeship. The sample size was 391.

<sup>17</sup> See <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships/2023-24>; accessed 26<sup>th</sup> September 2024. Figures for 2023/24 are for August 2023 to April 2024.

<sup>18</sup> See HE student enrolments by level of study, academic years 2017/18 to 2021/22 <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/whos-in-he>, accessed 31<sup>st</sup> July 2024. These are the latest data, but cover starters in 2021/22.

- Construction, planning and the built environment is the 5<sup>th</sup> largest group, after business administration and law; health, public services and care; engineering and manufacturing technologies; and retail and commercial enterprise.
- Under 19s accounted for 25.1% of apprenticeship starts in 2023/24 (around 70,000), 19 to 24 year olds accounted for 28.4% and those aged 25 and older accounted for 46.5%.
- Higher apprenticeships (these are at Level 4 and above), increased by 7.3% on the previous year (to just over 100,000); with intermediate level apprenticeships (at Level 2) falling dramatically from 2016/17.
- Starts supported by the levy accounted for 66.6% of all apprenticeship starts.
- Learner participation decreased compared to the previous year.

Statistics for **T levels** in 2022/23<sup>19</sup> show:

- Almost 3,500 students received T level results (91% passed overall, 95% passed their occupational specialism, 95% completed their industry placement).
- Design, surveying and planning accounted for 12.8% of T level results (441), building services engineering 6.0% (207) and onsite construction 2.2% (75).
- Overall pass rates for construction relevant T levels were: building services engineering (86%), design, surveying and planning (96%) and onsite construction (79%).

On the tools report (2024) that more construction focused apprenticeships are needed. Also, that more new starters on apprenticeships are needed to fill the growing void within the industry and that improvements in terms of more hands-on work, better pay and improved visibility of trade career paths and promotion of construction apprenticeships in schools could help. However, work by the British Association of Construction Heads (BACH, 2024), drawing on DfE statistics, would suggest that even more starters are required due to the high drop-out rates of construction apprentices; or that work is needed to stem the out-flow. They assert that construction apprenticeships are not delivering what is needed as the drop-out rate is high (at 47%, with the highest drop-out between 3 and 11 months on programme) meaning that many apprentices don't reach the End Point Assessment (EPA). The key reasons for construction apprenticeships leaving the training / sector are because the salary is considered too low (the proportion citing this reason is much higher than found across all apprenticeships), followed by being fired or made redundant, or because they didn't feel they would pass the EPA. Construction apprentices were also less likely to be satisfied with the quality of their training and the experience/knowledge of their tutors compared to other apprentices.

- **Confusion of provision and pathways:** There have been frequent changes to the delivery of technical and vocational education and in the underpinning policy and strategy as the government tries to tackle skills gaps. This leads to a complex,

<sup>19</sup> See <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/provisional-t-level-results/2022-23>, accessed 9<sup>th</sup> April 2024

confusing, competing and changing array of provision and qualifications which contributes to a lack of brand awareness/understanding and also frustration among employers and potential entrants to vocational education and a lack of access (City and Guilds Group, 2014, Nancarrow et al, 2023, Ofsted, 2023). The Government has most recently been engaging in reforms to technical and further education, which aim to streamline and simplify the technical qualifications system and ensure that vocational and technical education provides an alternative but equivalent route - through education into employment - to the academic pathway. This led to plans to defund existing qualifications at level 3 and below including BTECs and to the introduction of new qualifications<sup>20</sup>. The plans evoked considerable reaction from the education sector including concerns that removing BTECs – a valued qualification in the labour market and familiar route into higher education – would negatively impact on student choice and accessibility, particularly for disadvantaged students<sup>21</sup>.

T levels were introduced as part of these reforms but (as noted above) take-up remains low, students' expectations are not being met, retention is poor, and there remains considerable work to do to improve the quality and effectiveness of T level courses and placements (Ofsted, 2023). DfE statistics do indicate a growing awareness of T levels among parents, teachers and potential students, but the department recognises there is more to do to increase awareness and translate awareness into active consideration (DfE, 2024<sup>22</sup>). Additionally, employers may be less invested in newer offerings such as T levels whereas apprenticeships do still have traction and are viewed positively as a useful alternative to traditional academia among those employers who are engaged with the skills system (i.e. with apprentices, employees taking technical qualifications or offering T level placements) (Nancarrow et al, 2023).

- **Potentially lower returns:** The research on the relative earnings potential of vocational pathways compared to academic pathways is complex given the diversity of provision and levels, the relatively small size of the vocationally educated population, that young people on vocational pathways tend to have lower previous achievement and come from more disadvantaged backgrounds, and that vocational pathways may be a stepping stone to academic qualifications. Some research indicates an earnings premium for vocational education relative to a degree. However, this may relate to higher level vocational and technical education (e.g. foundation degrees and HNDs/HNCs) and may exclude apprenticeships and tends to show a positive effect in early working life but that the initial premium/advantage erodes over time (analysis by CVER in 2020 following secondary school leavers in England completing compulsory

<sup>20</sup> The review of post-16 qualifications initiated by the Conservative Government has been paused by the incoming Labour Government. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/dfe-pauses-post-16-qualifications-review-and-btec-defunding/>, and <https://feweek.co.uk/labour-pledges-to-pause-and-review-btecs-cull/>. Accessed 26<sup>th</sup> September 2024.

<sup>21</sup> Such as the #ProtectStudentChoice campaign, See <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7951/CBP-7951.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> The Parent, Pupil and Learner Panel survey in June 2023 found 47% of parents, 50% of pupils and 86% of teachers were aware of T levels, reported in DfE, 2024.

education between 2001/02 and 2005/06, Espinoza and Speckesser, 2019, quoted in DfE, 2023). Other research indicates that vocational education leads to lower earnings relative to a degree (facilitating school to work transitions and raising the labour market prospects of low-achieving students but diverting higher-achieving students from educational pathways that lead towards better paying jobs). Again, this research tends to exclude apprenticeships (Matthews and Ventura, 2022; Dearden et al, 2000). Where earnings of those with an apprenticeship are compared with graduate earnings, median earnings of those with levels 5 to 7 apprenticeships are higher<sup>23</sup> but could be explained by the range of levels at which an individual can undertake an apprenticeship; and it is important to note that level 5+ apprenticeships make up a very small proportion of apprenticeships (see <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-03-01/132190>).

- **Restricted access:** Some suggest there is limited access to vocational pathways, particularly for young people and those from disadvantaged backgrounds, despite being regarded as a mechanism for social mobility. Doherty and Holt-White (2021) undertaking research for the Sutton Trust highlight a decline in the number of opportunities available since 2017, and a shift in the composition of apprenticeships available from levels 2 and 3 to higher and degree level which require additional qualifications and experience to be eligible to participate. This was echoed in a review by London Economics for the Association of Colleges. This attributed the changes to the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy, and noted how the current funding system, with levy funds tied to the employer paying the Levy and can only be spent on apprenticeship training, has led to the majority of funds being spent by large employers in specific sectors typically on older workers and Level 4 or above starts (Battiston et al, 2024). This has resulted in fewer opportunities for young people overall. Doherty and Holt-White (2021) note that only 5% of degree level apprenticeship starts in 2020/21 were taken up by under 19s. Those from affluent areas were most likely to take on higher and degree level apprenticeships, with individuals from the most deprived areas being least likely. The gap between take up of apprenticeships becomes more acute in young age groups with 3.5 times as many level 4 apprentices from affluent areas compared to the most deprived areas (Doherty and Holt-White, 2021).

Some of the concerns around restricted access relate to employers' capacity to offer the diversity and volume of vocational programmes, including the new(er) T levels which incorporate a mandatory work placement. Work for the DfE around the introduction of T levels found that, although employers tended to be positive about T levels, they questioned their capacity and capability to offer the range and volume of placements required. The research found employers offering work-based learning experienced challenges in managing placements and reached a 'saturation point' where taking on additional learners required more staff resource than they could spare; whereas smaller employers were reluctant to divert resources to train and supervise young learners or felt unable to offer meaningful opportunities (Foster et al, 2018). Further research indicated that many employers who had not engaged with T

<sup>23</sup> £29,030 compared with £27,400 for a first degree graduate, median earnings five years after graduation.

levels felt they did not have the capacity to support placements and saw other vocational routes such as apprenticeships as a more important organisational priority, or that the costs involved in offering and supervising high quality placements outweighed potential benefits (Williams et al, 2020). Similarly, finding suitable placements was found to be a barrier to increasing the number of T level places available (NfER T levels research, December 2019 and Ofsted T level thematic review 2023, both cited in Lewis and Bolton, 2023).

- **Lack of diversity:** Vocational and technical pathways have suffered from a lack of diversity, gendered occupational stereotyping and under-representation of young people from ethnic minorities. This has been the subject of policy attention to try to address. Research here, as far back as 2010s (Williams et al, 2013) re-enforces the findings that stereotypes of careers form at a very young age and career decisions are influenced by parents and the media, and that by key stage 4 (age 14 to 16) the challenge for schools and careers professionals to overturn these may be almost insurmountable.

Progress continues to be slow. For example, the Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board (SAAB, 2022) have recently looked at the lack of gender diversity in Scottish workplace apprenticeships, including construction, and suggest reasons why this imbalance has occurred. They argue that traditional, cultural norms and outdated value systems, disseminated through influential adult figures such as parents and teachers, have led to outdated views around gender stereotyping being embedded into young people's understanding of potential careers and future aspirations. Despite the best efforts of employers to attend education settings to inform students of the options available to them, these interventions are thought to be too late in the life course to influence subject choices and in turn, possible career paths.

### 2.3.1 Implications for the construction sector

The construction sector relies on workers with vocational education and training, and demand for construction skills is expected to be buoyant. Construction sector forecasts project modest growth in 2024 which is set to increase from 2025. Expected growth coupled with the need to replace those leaving the sector, indicates an extra 251,500 construction workers are needed in the UK by 2028, which equates to approximately 50,000 each year. Additionally, the sector is seen as a catalyst for growth and for moving to green methods and technologies. However, this will depend on the sufficient supply of construction skills, as well as digital and green skills (CITB, 2024; Cedefop, 2023).



Vocational pathways may be increasing in popularity but still relatively small in comparison with academic routes for young people, so is a relatively small talent pool for the sector. One study noted how the number of applications for built environment programmes offered through universities increases each year, but the number of apprenticeships does not increase proportionally. This has resulted in students interested in construction going through the university route, rather than the apprenticeship route (Ryan et al, 2022). There have been some increases in the take up of apprenticeships in construction among traditionally under-represented groups, but the increase is small and

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actually decreased among the most deprived groups (APPG, 2023). Stereotypes have a strong hold and young women in particular hold the idea that construction apprenticeships are not suitable for them (Ryan et al, 2022).

There are clearly opportunities for the construction sector, with support from CITB to promote vocational pathways into the sector and demonstrate the specific benefits occupational skills and work-based learning bring to individuals and employers, to increase the number of individuals in vocational education or training and opportunities for them. There are also opportunities for the sector to improve the experience of apprenticeships to reduce drop-out and to work to increase diversity of take-up and support opportunities for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, particularly to higher level technical education and apprenticeships. This could harness the work of the New Entrant Support Team (NEST) developed by CITB to support employers across the UK and help reduce the barriers to recruiting and retaining new entrants, particularly apprentices. However, apprenticeship models are reliant on employers training their workers (rather than subcontracting) and on employer and job stability, which the contracting model and project-based nature of the sector can make challenging (Ryan et al, 2022).

## 2.4 Issues facing adults outside the labour market

The literature concerning adults outside of the labour market is broad in scope, with little information specific to the construction industry or competitor (adjacent) industries, and tends to focus on employment, roles or careers more generally rather than considering differences between industries and roles. However, it does indicate that there are several issues when thinking about engaging with adults outside of the labour market and helping them to consider ways into or back to the labour market and specifically a career in construction. These include recognising the growing size and diversity of the economically inactive, the range of services (national, regional and local) aimed at this group working to reduce economic inactivity, the complex barriers faced by this group in accessing work and the specific and different issues faced by each of the groups.

- **Growing size of the economically inactive:** The UK faces labour market challenges, notably wide (and growing) employment (and pay) gaps for different groups and between different areas with disabled people, those with the lowest qualifications, ethnic minorities, lone parents, older people and those in the most deprived areas faring the worst. Additionally, the UK faces falling labour force participation and growing numbers outside the labour market, the latter are generally referred to as the economically inactive<sup>24</sup>. Economic inactivity is rising most among those who last worked at least 5 years ago, those who last worked between 2 and 3 years ago, and those who have never worked. Other challenges included falling access to training in

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<sup>24</sup> In official statistics, economic activity is defined as people aged 16 to 64 who are not in employment, who have not been seeking work within the last four weeks and/or are unable to start work within the next two weeks.

work (affecting productivity growth), persistent low pay, and rising poverty among households in work (Wilson and Muir, 2022; LGA, 2023).

Analysis of the latest labour market statistics (IES, 2024, covering December 2023 to February 2024) shows economic inactivity – individuals of working age who are not looking for work and/or not available for work - has reached its highest rate since 2015 at 22.2% (just over 9.4 million) even higher than during the Covid-19 pandemic. This is driven by:

- fewer young people aged 16 to 24 in the labour force (due to higher participation in education but also increasing numbers of young people not in employment, education or training NEET);
- more older people (aged 50 to 64) out of work; and
- more people of all ages off work due to long-term health conditions (a record high of 2.83 million).

At the same time, the level of participation in the labour force is falling with more people outside the labour force rather than employed or unemployed. Raising participation in the labour force is crucial to support economic recovery and growth, address labour shortages and prevent harmful effects of worklessness and unemployment to individuals (particularly young people). Indeed, long periods of unemployment can impact on future income, skills validity, future employability, job satisfaction, happiness and health levels (Wilson and Muir, 2022; LGA, 2023; Dean, 2013). The government are making moves to support increasing participation including extending employment support, health services and childcare, but employers need to do more:

*'...employers will need to step up too, both in terms of what happens in workplaces (the design of jobs and the support that they offer) and in how they work with wider local partners who are engaging and supporting people outside the labour force'* (IES, 2024, p2).

- **Diversity of the economically inactive:** Those outside the labour market, generally referred to as the economically inactive<sup>25</sup>, are a broad and highly diverse group including students, early retirees, those with caring responsibilities, and those with poor physical and mental health (Wilson and Muir, 2022). The economically inactive are not in work and either not seeking work or unable to work. In official statistics they are a separate group from those out of work but looking for work who are classed as unemployed. This distinction may be unhelpful for those seeking to engage with new sources of workers, together the economically inactive and the unemployed covers those out of work.

Recent work by Percy has considered both those out of work and those in work, to see who would potentially benefit from career guidance, and this may be a more helpful way to think about potential new sources of workers in terms of individuals who could be supported to consider construction as a career. Percy identified 8 categories

<sup>25</sup> In official statistics, economic activity is defined as people aged 16 to 64 who are not in employment, who have not been seeking work within the last four weeks and/or are unable to start work within the next two weeks.

'segments' of potential adult guidance users (an estimated 11 million adults in England, or 25% of the over 18 population). The 8 segments include 5 segments covering those out of work but would like work: young people NEET, those currently focused on responsibilities at home or with family, those not currently seeking work due to health constraints, those interested in work but not currently seeking work due to other reasons including retirement or in education, and those who are long term unemployed. Whereas the additional three segments cover those who are in work but facing issues, and these include: those seeking new or additional work or more hours, those in precarious work (due to a non-permanent work contract or in an occupation at risk of automation or decline), and those who are unhappy at work. The work again illustrates the diversity of the population of potential workers, and the personas Percy has developed for each segment highlight further diversity within each of his segments (Percy, 2022). The diversity of needs means that some adults may not be well served with career guidance as central government support tends to be focused on young people NEET, those receiving benefits and those with disabilities (Percy, 2022).

- **Range of services on offer:** There are numerous programmes, services and initiatives in England and the wider UK to support the economically inactive. This creates numerous 'touchpoints' to engage with these individuals but by no means cover all those outside the labour market and there are many individuals who are very hard to reach and it also creates a potentially confusing array of support. In England these include the new Universal Support programme, extending free childcare, and rolling out the Mid-life MOT tools for adults on universal credit<sup>26</sup>. The support can be categorised as employment support, education and skills, broad-based support (including careers focused activities), and employer support (aimed at making workplaces more accessible. Support is led by a range of public bodies and organisations reflecting the diversity of the economically inactive population. However, a review by the Local Government Association notes how working to reduce economic inactivity is complex and time-consuming. Challenges they cite include:
  - difficulties identifying those most in need of support and reaching these individuals as they may not be in contact with employment and skills services;
  - the causes of inactivity are often multi-faceted, combining family, health, confidence and practical barriers; and
  - the national support available is a 'patchwork', with tight eligibility criteria, narrowly targeted clients and limited geographical reach, and mainly indirectly addresses economic activity (as largely focused on unemployed). (LGA, 2023).

- **Complex and different barriers:** Those outside of the labour market face complex and multiple barriers to accessing work and policy changes may serve to compound the issues and lead to negative impacts. Complex needs are not always clear when first engaging with disadvantaged adults so the right help may not be given straightaway (APPG, 2017). The literature provided an insight into the context,

<sup>26</sup> Announced in the Spring Budget 2023

experiences and challenges for some of the groups within the economically inactive population.

- **Young adults:** Young people, particularly those NEET, face many barriers. Mismatched human capital i.e. skills gaps (not having the right mix of skills and qualifications, that align with jobs in their area) is seen as a major driver behind youth unemployment, particularly for young people from low income, disadvantaged backgrounds, and living in households that are more reliant on benefits and tax credits. Other barriers to work, and to good work, include:
  - lack of access to work experience and networks and not knowing the right people (lack of cultural and social capital);
  - lack of confidence and a lack of preparation for the world of work;
  - fierce competition in the labour market coupled with unrealistic expectations from employers about prior work experience;
  - financial challenges such as ability to purchase necessities to work and study, access to digital equipment to work from home and/or initially apply for jobs; and
  - poor mental and physical health, with rising levels of ill-health particularly among those with low skills levels and in rural areas.

Disparities noticed in early years widen with time, and disadvantaged young people become more disadvantaged e.g. less likely to attend HE and more likely to become NEET. Young people were also particularly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, losing out on education and work which impacted negatively on their mental health, aspirations and prospects (APPG on Youth Employment, 2017; House of Lords Unemployment Committee, 2021; Orlando, 2021; Murphy, 2023).

There are concerns that young people's need for work and for good work have often been overlooked by policy makers. It can be difficult for young people to engage in and complete employment support programmes, and initiatives to address skills mismatches are short-term and do not address the structural causes of youth unemployment nor align with key growth areas for the future economy (APPG on Youth Employment, 2017; House of Lords Unemployment Committee, 2021).

- **Disabled adults:** Disabled people are much less likely to be in employment than non-disabled adults. The numbers of disabled people in employment have increased and the gap in employment rate between disabled and non-disabled people has decreased, but the number of disabled people who are economically inactive has also increased. The inactivity rate of disabled people was 43.1% compared to 14.9% for people who are not disabled<sup>27</sup>. Those with epilepsy, autism, severe/specific learning difficulties or mental illness, those with more than one health condition, older disabled people and those with no qualifications are much less likely to be in employment (Powell, 2024).

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<sup>27</sup> Figures for the last quarter of 2023.

Disabled people face challenges and barriers in multiple areas of their lives including employment barriers which impact on their confidence and self-esteem. Employment barriers include physical (access and IT), organisational (rigid policies or performance targets), attitudinal (assumptions and biases), and social (where workers are excluded because of others' pre-conceptions) and these result in non-inclusive workplaces and cultures. Examples include unconscious bias, lack of flexible working, lack of variety in contract types. Additionally, for job-seekers physical barriers exist such as jobs posted on platforms that are not compatible with assistive technology, lack of accessible entrances at interview venues, inaccessible interview tests and formats, and negative attitudes about abilities, skills and capabilities of disabled people (Leonard Cheshire, 2021; HSE, 2022; Chartered Governance Institute UK & Ireland<sup>28</sup>, Scope for business, 2023<sup>29</sup>).

This group has tended to be most affected by recessions and were particularly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic had a disproportionate impact on every aspect of disabled people's lives including employment and access to work. They were more likely to have been placed on furlough or work reduced hours than non-disabled people and employers' likelihood of employing a disabled person worsened. There are concerns that the '*job shock prompted by the pandemic risks locking disabled people – at every stage of their working life – out of the workplace*' (Leonard Cheshire, 2021, p4).

- **Older adults:** In response to an aging population in the UK and the challenge of attracting young entrants, research has explored older workers employment preferences and policy has focused on extending working lives (EWL) with programmes to facilitate and prolong employment. More recently, research and commentary have focused on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on economic activity and the causes of rising inactivity rates particularly among older adults. It has been recognised that the much of the rise in economic inactivity since the start of the pandemic was due to rising inactivity among 50- to 64-year-olds. This was driven by long-term sickness, earlier retirement (the largest contributor) and the UK's aging population. Economic inactivity has risen for both men and women, although women were more likely to say this was to look after their home or family and men were more likely to say this was for retirement or health reasons (Ranki, 2023).

Early retirement is most common among part-time workers and the self-employed arguably those already winding down their careers, and also among middle to high earners (based on hourly wage) arguably those reasonably well resourced. There is little hard evidence on the drivers for the increase in retirement, however suggestions include push factors such as behaviour changes resulting from the

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.cgi.org.uk/blog/disability-employment-barriers>

<sup>29</sup> <https://business.scope.org.uk/article/understanding-the-challenges-of-disabled-jobseekers#:~:text=Employment%20barriers,-There%20are%20a&text=lack%20of%20accessible%20entrances%20at, and%20capabilities%20of%20disabled%20people>

pandemic, life choices and reactions to the intensification of work demands, and the furlough scheme detaching people from their jobs. Whereas suggestions for retirement enabling factors were pensions flexibilities, increased savings and redundancy payments (during the pandemic). The limited research suggests that earlier retirement looks to be '*a lifestyle choice rather than reluctant departure from the labour market*'. Generally, those leaving for retirement have no intention of working and are unlikely to be enticed back to work (even with rising costs of living) (Economic Affairs Committee, 2022). The House of Commons paper (Rankl, 2023) provides some optimism. This cites the IFS who reported an uptick in older workers re-joining the workforce (in late 2023) which could be due to the cost of living crisis, and cites the Bank of England who argue that the effects of the pandemic on retirement decisions will fade over time.

#### 2.4.1 Implications for the construction sector

Percy's work (2022) categorising and segmenting the economically inactive or those at risk of inactivity illustrates the size of each potential group, the different issues faced, and thus how different groups may need different strategies to target and attract. His work also acknowledges how some adults would not potentially benefit from career guidance or be open to guidance i.e. those who would not like to work, and a review by the LGA asserts that '*not all of the economically inactive cohorts can be seen as 'addressable' through policy and programmes and public debate has recognised that some working age groups will be very difficult to bring back into the labour market or have made conscious decisions to leave it.*' (LGA, 2023). This provides useful information for the construction sector on which groups of individuals to target.



The wider work outlining the barriers faced by young people, disabled people and older people who are economically inactive also highlights the particular barriers faced and potential opportunities for the construction sector to make a difference. For example, helping youth initiatives to align with the green and digital agenda, both areas that are important to the construction sector; and helping disabled people to apply for construction jobs by working to make workplaces more inclusive, implementing more flexible working and contracts, and thinking about the practicalities of recruitment. However, the indications are that many older adults choosing to retire early and are now economically inactive, have made a lifestyle choice and are unlikely to persuaded back.

## 3 Understanding careers provision

This chapter explores how careers provision works in the UK and some common areas suggested as best practice. As noted earlier, this report was produced during the Conservative Government administration, thus some planned activities may be subject to change.

### 3.1 Careers provision in Great Britain

Careers support is a key mechanism (alongside, and set within, employment and skills support) for supporting people of all ages in to work. Careers provision is devolved to national governments, and so each has a different system and approach.

#### 3.1.1 England

In England, the careers guidance system consists of:

- guidance for young people typically provided through mainstream education (with organisational decisions taken by schools) with the Careers & Enterprise Company and the National Careers Service (NCS) providing additional support;
- guidance for HE students provided through HE institutions (who may also do some outreach with local schools and colleges and support graduates for a limited time after completing their studies); and
- support and guidance for adults provided through the NCS (who prioritise some groups over others) and support for the unemployed provided through Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) jobcentres.

Careers guidance support (often targeted at or available to certain groups) is also provided through local government, charities, prisons/probation services, health services and social care, employers, trade unions, and professional organisations; and through private sector organisations who charge individuals directly for their services (Hooley et al, 2023).

#### Strengths and weaknesses and looking to the future

The system has strengths with an already established National Careers Service and Careers & Enterprise Company, skilled professionals, a growing evidence base, and clear guiding principles for young people in the Gatsby Benchmarks<sup>30</sup>. However, young people

<sup>30</sup> The 8 Gatsby Benchmarks were developed in 2014 on behalf of the Gatsby Foundation to define what 'world class careers provision in education' looks like. They provide a framework for organising careers

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from the UK report the lowest value in school preparing them for their working life, and lowest ratings for the usefulness of school career guidance (OECD results from 2019), the careers system is fragmented with multiple funders, there is an inconsistency in access to services, a lack of clarity for referral agencies such as Jobcentre Plus, and pay, retention and recruitment challenges for career guidance staff (Hooley et al, 2023).

In 2022, the government launched an inquiry into careers education, information, advice and guidance to increase engagement with stakeholders and inform the future approach to the provision of careers support, and a new strategic action plan was to be published in 2024. This would focus on three main priorities of: a single, unified careers system (a one-stop shop for all ages and backgrounds), skills training and experience that has parity with academic pathways, and social justice.

### 3.1.2 Scotland

Careers guidance in Scotland is delivered by Skills Development Scotland (SDS). In contrast to England, Scotland from the early 2000s created an all-age structure for careers provision (originally delivered by Careers Scotland). This has shared principles across education, training and employability services for young people and adults, and emphasises collaborative partnerships and working closely with target groups to meet needs. Its ambition is for individuals not to just be in work but in rewarding careers that contribute to Scotland's economic, social and environmental needs, and to support the creation of a productive and resilient workforce by generating opportunities for people to enter and progress in the labour market.

For those in schools, the SDS has careers advisers based in every state school and every additional needs school alongside a strong online presence ('My World of Work') and telephone helpline. Further education colleges provide skills, resources, advice and support through partnership agreements with SDS. For those not in schools, there are centres in each local authority area to access support, an online presence and telephone helpline. Thus, no groups are excluded from access to support (Stewart, 2023).

#### Strengths and weaknesses and looking to the future

Despite having an all-age system and in-person, online and telephone delivery, a comprehensive review of careers services in Scotland identified that in reality much of the services have been focused on young adults and the system was complex and fragmented and part of the education and skills infrastructure. The review recommended a simple, person-centred, experiential, and community-based model to provide fair and meaningful work opportunities and digital empowerment. It was felt that there should be

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provision in schools and colleges, setting out the different dimensions of good career guidance. The benchmarks were developed through research to identify good practice in career guidance and examine the actions that could be taken to improve and embed career guidance in secondary schools, which at the time was considered to be insufficient, lacking in quality, and often provided too late to meet young people's needs. See <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/reports/pdf/gatsby-sir-john-holman-good-career-guidance-2014.pdf>

increased engagement between the government and local employers, trade unions and professional bodies to develop a more localised, long-term approach to understanding careers. Also, there should be greater engagement with the Fair Work First criteria and guidelines, which are the Scottish government's policy for driving high quality and fair work, which would also help public sector bodies to engage with businesses. It was recommended that this approach be accompanied by clear job roles within the guidance service, outcome-based evaluation measures and a career service coalition to oversee implementation (Stewart, 2023; CITB, 2023; Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board, 2022).

### 3.1.3 Wales

Wales (like Scotland) has an all-age system. Bilingual careers services are delivered through a mixture of guidance services and advice from the government owned subsidiary Careers Wales. Careers Wales was set up in 2001 to provide a national all-age service to respond to local needs. Running alongside are Welsh Government-run projects including ReAct+<sup>31</sup>, Activate, Working Wales<sup>32</sup>, Employment Bureaus, and Communities for Work+ (CITB, 2023; Stewart, 2023).

Schools and colleges provide careers education, information and initial advice and Careers Wales provides more in-depth careers guidance, curriculum support and guidance. Over time (with austerity and budget cuts) adult guidance services arguably became a higher priority and sometimes at the expense of services to young people (resulting in more targeted services from Careers Wales and schools taking on a larger role) (Stewart, 2023).

#### Looking to the future

Recently Careers Wales published a 5-year strategy *Brighter Futures* which sets out its vision to improve the services, and the development of the strategy was influenced by the Welsh Government's plan for employability and skills (*A Stronger, Fairer and Greener Wales*). The four goals for *Brighter Futures* are: provide a bilingual, inclusive and impartial careers advice and coaching service; develop the work of Careers Wales with employers, training providers and entrepreneurs to understand skills requirements and opportunities for young people and adults; to support the delivery of the Curriculum for Wales (particularly around encouraging lifelong learning and enterprise, and developing young people to become ethical and informed citizens, and healthy and confident individuals); and develop the Careers Wales workforce (including increasing their digital skills). Additionally, the strategy sought to extend careers work to primary schools and to

<sup>31</sup> ReAct+ provides tailored support to those looking to re-enter the labour market including grant support for training, travel costs and care. It is available to Welsh residents aged 20 or over and is accessed through Working Wales. <https://workingwales.gov.wales/how-we-can-help/react-plus>

<sup>32</sup> Working Wales is a free service delivered by Career Wales and available to anyone aged 16 and over and living in Wales to access expert advice and coaching to overcome any obstacles to getting a job or progressing a career. <https://workingwales.gov.wales/>

introduce mid-career reviews (via Working Wales) which could encourage career switchers and older workers (Stewart, 2023).

### 3.1.4 Implications for the construction sector

Careers services are devolved to the individual nations, they differ in approach, coverage (and arguably prime focus) and degree of cohesion. Additionally, the services in England, Scotland and Wales are all changing or on the cusp of change and it is unclear the level funding available to provide these services going forward. This all creates challenges for the sector and CITB in understanding how best to harness and work with the careers infrastructure. However, all nations appear to recognise the importance of careers guidance; the need for the careers system to align with the education and skills systems (as skills needs and opportunities change); to work with employers to understand skills needs, provide work experience opportunities and engage with schools; and extend careers support into primary schools. Propitiously CITB works across Great Britain with strong teams in each of the GB nations providing it with a good view of current practice and likely future direction and the means to influence practice in each nation.



## 3.2 Providing careers guidance

The literature provides insights and some evidence around the impact of career intervention and what works in providing career guidance: notably personal guidance (that is tailored and provides one to one support via a structured conversation usually face-to face) delivered by a career guidance professional. Employers also play an important role, as does embedding careers work within broader learning. A key source of evidence has been the work undertaken by McIntosh and Yates (2019). Evaluation focused research, particularly impact evaluation, in the field of careers can be hampered due to difficulties in determining what (and how) to measure as an outcome, the timeframe for capturing outcomes (allowing for longer term outcomes to emerge) and lack of diversity in those participating in research limiting potential for transferability and generalisability of results (Brown, 2016; Everitt et al, 2018). This means research tends to be focused, at least at present, on narrative and empirical enquiry rather than causality, but is likely to grow with the increasing policy focus on what works.

A review undertaken by Brown (2016) drawing on quantitative evaluation-based studies identified three key findings about the effectiveness of career interventions. Firstly, that career interventions are modestly more effective than doing nothing in promoting outcomes associated with choice-making and job finding. Secondly, that there are key components associated with positive outcomes. For choice-making these include establishing written goals, providing information on the world of work, modelling of good career behaviour(s), encouraging building of support, and individual attention (allowing for tailored advice); and for job-finding include promoting goal setting, teaching job search skills, improving self-presentation, enlisting social support, boosting self-efficacy and encouraging proactivity. Lastly, promoting goal setting, building and enlisting support, and building self-efficacy appear critical to career intervention effectiveness and thus provide

guidelines for careers interventions in the future. Goal setting can direct attention and sustain efforts, and support from family and friends can boost self-efficacy, help translate interests into choices and find jobs, and again help sustain efforts.

### 3.2.1 Personal guidance

Personal guidance is costly but is found to be the most effective career intervention by time spent compared to other 'practitioner-free' interventions (such as information provision) or to no intervention.

- It leads to positive impacts on personal effectiveness (self-image, self-efficacy, motivation and resilience) via self-reflection and clarifying values, on career readiness (understanding occupations, decision-making, planning, and self-preparation) helping to develop vocational identity and aspirations, and also on educational outcomes (increased attendance, reduced drop-out, enhanced attainment and progression, and personal and social competence) (Oliver & Spokane, 1988, Brechstein & Stevens, 2003, Everitt et al, 2003, all cited in McIntosh and Yates, 2019; and Everitt et al, 2018).
- It is more effective in developing young people's vocational identity than other interventions (McIntosh and Yates, 2019, working with secondary school pupils).
- It is associated with positive learning and career outcomes for lower skilled adults such as engaging in work focused learning, reskilling and making job changes; and helps people recognise and value their achievements and increases self-confidence (Pollard et al, 2007).

It provides opportunities for individuals to discuss career ideas and plans, and to identify the support needed and what they need to do to progress; and can bring people into contact with labour market information and help them to reflect what this means for their career aspirations in terms of real opportunities. The greater depth and tailored nature of support offered through personal guidance is even more effective when experienced as part of an ongoing process rather than one-off and (where relevant) when involving employer encouragement and support (Pollard et al, 2007; Oliver and Spokane, 1988, Reid, 2018, cited in Everitt et al, 2018). Also, for young people, it is more effective when it is integrated into a whole school careers guidance programme supported by senior leadership and involving all staff (as teachers often serve as the first point of contact for students' career concerns), it is delivered by a qualified, skilled professional in safe, secure and private space, students are prepared beforehand and followed up afterwards, and available when needed as well as at (or sufficiently in advance of) key decision points as young people's conceptions about themselves and potential careers are constantly evolving (Everitt et al, 2018).

### 3.2.2 Employer interventions

Employer interventions are an important form of career support and tend to take three key forms:

- linking employers with school children (employer career fairs, employer talks, projects).

- linking employers with teaching staff (offering work experiences, job shadowing etc for teachers).
- employers offering (meaningful) work experiences for pupils:

*‘...gaining meaningful experience of the workplace, through opportunities like work experience placements, work visits or work shadowing, can allow a young person to really investigate the industry or sector.’* (House of Commons Education Committee, 2023, p9).

The Careers & Enterprise Company plays a key role in England in the coordination of activities between school children, teaching staff and employers. CEC is developing the *Experiences of the Workplace* framework and a resource hub to share best practice and toolkits to promote work experiences for teachers. It has also developed the *Employer Standards* digital benchmarking framework tool for employers to assess and improve their engagement. Additionally, the DfE is working to simplify access to work experience (addressing barriers around safeguarding and health and safety) (House of Commons Education Committee, 2023).

Employer engagement in careers support is associated with a range of benefits:

- broadening young people’s awareness of opportunities (Mcintosh and Yates, 2019).
- employability skills and academic attainment (human capital), personal connections with employers (social capital), and raised aspirations and broadened perspectives (cultural capital) (Stanleys and Mann, 2014, as cited in Mcintosh and Yates, 2019).
- lower likelihood to be NEET (Percy & Mann, 2014, cited in Mcintosh and Yates, 2019).
- improved hard outcomes such as, higher wages and improved long-term labour market outcomes (Kashefpakdel & Percy, 2016, Percy & Mann, 2014, cited in Mcintosh and Yates, 2019).

Young people appreciate employer inputs to careers support and view it as ‘more genuine’, ‘from experience’, and ‘trusted’ as opposed to a careers adviser ‘telling you what to do’ (Jones & Mann, 2014, as cited in Mcintosh and Yates, 2019). However, Mcintosh and Yates’s own primary research (2019) comparing personal career guidance interviews and employer interventions supports the view that employer engagement is complementary to practitioner-led interventions. Employer interventions may broaden young people’s awareness of opportunities more than guidance interviews, but guidance interviews may help young people to process information more effectively than employer interventions.

### 3.2.3 Embedding careers in the curriculum

Much of the literature relating to careers in the curriculum is focused on older pupils, secondary school age and older. This indicates that careers can be embedded by providing it as a subject in its own right, incorporating career learning within other subjects, or organising career learning through co-curricular activities (e.g. enrichment activities, careers clubs, STEM clubs). Embedding careers into the curriculum is one of the eight Gatsby benchmarks for secondary schools and colleges in recognition that

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embedding careers learning within the broader pupil curriculum and in teacher training and professional development can be an effective way to deliver career guidance. Embedding careers in the curriculum aims to promote students' career learning development and wellbeing, and also enhance their attainment, as well as overall personal and social development. There is some limited and preliminary evidence suggesting positive impacts on personal effectiveness (motivation, self-belief and self-efficacy), career readiness (career exploration skills, understanding of occupations, decision-making) and educational outcomes (including attendance) (Colins and Barnes, 2017).

The delivery of careers in the curriculum requires high quality curriculum resources to show how curriculum subjects are used in a range of different industries and job roles. These are being developed all the time by the Careers & Enterprise Company (in its Careers in the Curriculum Guide) and a range of stakeholder organisations including professional and subject bodies e.g. STEM.org, Geographical Association, Design and Technology Association, Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport, and Tomorrow's Engineers. It also requires careers education content for teacher professional development including developing careers awareness among subject teachers. A key initiative is the Teachers Encounters<sup>33</sup> programme (delivered through the Careers & Enterprise Company's Career Hubs) which provides opportunities for teachers to work with employers to understand subject relevant career pathways and see how subject knowledge is applied in business (Colins and Barnes, 2017; House of Commons Education Committee, 2023). Another is the Founders4schools (F4S) teacher CPD encounter<sup>34</sup>. However, DfE is so far holding back from incorporating examples from the world of work into model curricula and curriculum materials as it doesn't want to prescribe how teachers do this (House of Commons Education Committee, 2023).

It is recommended that schools engage with parents, colleges and employers in order to enhance the impact of careers in the curriculum, and there are examples of good practice including Career Ready<sup>35</sup> (bringing employer volunteers into schools to deliver masterclasses, careers and tutorial sessions, and work with teachers) and Future first<sup>36</sup> (putting schools in touch with former pupils to provide relatable career role models for current pupils '*having grown up in the same area and perhaps having had some of the same teachers*', and provide mentoring, work shadowing or talks) (Colins and Barnes, 2017).

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<sup>33</sup> This was piloted in 2021/22 and found evidence of positive impact and strong support from teachers, and had a wider launch in 2023. <https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/employers/teacher-encounters-tools-and-resources/>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.founders4schools.org.uk/educators/teacher-industry-insight-event/>

<sup>35</sup> <https://careeready.org.uk/about-us/>

<sup>36</sup> <https://futurefirst.org.uk/our-approach/>



### 3.2.4 Implications for the construction sector

Employers are a trusted source of information for young people and employer engagement in careers work with young people helps broaden horizons, helps students see how subjects link to careers, and tackle any pre-conceived notions, and helps to build connections and networks. Given that networks and connections are strongly linked to knowledge, interest and entry to construction, construction employers should continue to be encouraged and supported to work closely with schools and colleges, and maintain a classroom presence. CITB has programmes to support this activity but there are indications that employers may not be aware of what these are and the support on offer. CITB could look to promote these more widely. In addition, there are a range of tools, initiatives and organisations available to support employer engagement in careers work with young people that are not sector specific – to link employers with schools and engage with their pupils or to support and engage with their teachers. These include Founders4schools, Career Ready, the Employer Standards digital benchmarking framework (for work experience type activities), and the Teachers Encounters programme (for teacher education). CITB (perhaps working with the Careers & Enterprise Company) could produce and promote a resource guide for employers to raise awareness, with personal testimonies from employers about the experience (building on the Go Construct STEM Ambassadors programme that is aimed at individuals). A more challenging ambition would be to develop resources for teachers to help them deliver careers in the curriculum (showing how curriculum subjects link to construction careers), and thus get involved in supporting the Careers & Enterprise Company with its Careers in the Curriculum Guide and following the lead of other sectors.

A Careers & Enterprise Company report on The Potential of Teacher Encounters (CEC, 2023a) references examples of projects under the Teacher Encounters work. One example of relevance was of a physics teacher in Berkshire, matched with a construction company (Redrow, and Berkeley Homes), who obtained the company's crane radius charts to use with students when teaching about turning moments and levers (p4). This and examples like this would be helpful for CITB to collect and disseminate to the sector.

Personal guidance is regarded as the most effective (although most expensive) form of guidance for young people and adults. This indicates that CITB's work with careers services and careers leaders in schools, and its profile among careers advisors remains an important way to reach potential entrants – particularly young people (before career ideas are hardened) and potential career switchers.

## 3.3 Looking to the future (England)

In England, the careers system for young people appears to be working well and getting stronger but could still be improved (particularly with more purposeful engagement between schools and employers and support for teachers to gain insights to different career pathways and ways to link their teaching to the world of work (House of Commons Education Committee, 2023)). Whereas careers support for adults is strongly criticised and has been the subject of review and with differing opinions on its future direction.

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Indeed, in recent years, there has been much debate about the future structure and delivery of careers guidance. Most commentators and researchers agree the national systems could be improved, however their recommendations are not wholly in agreement and there are some areas of difference.

The Gatsby Foundation assert that adults deserve a high-quality careers guidance system, and that careers guidance for adults is key to tackling unemployment, underemployment and skills misalignment. They argue the system (in England) needs improving and simplifying.

Sir John Holman, senior adviser in education at the Gatsby Foundation and independent strategic adviser on career guidance for the Department for Education, undertook a forward-looking review of the career guidance system in England. His review resulted in recommendations for the future in the form of nine strategic principles and an overarching vision:

*'To ensure all people, whatever their age or situation, can get to the next and better stage of their career, through high quality careers guidance and relevant education, employment and training options, based on comprehensive and dynamic information and data.'*

He stressed that a publicly funded career guidance system be integrated with advice on education, employment and training. However, his vision does not appear to advocate a single all-age system, instead a more closely aligned system with clear responsibilities which balances local, regional and national needs, has robust quality assurance and monitoring, and is supported by a single source of labour market information and common terminology. The nine underpinning principles are:

1. Government's collective careers guidance activities should be underpinned by a public strategic framework, which provides overarching direction, priorities and objectives for careers services and is underpinned by a common taxonomy, information and data architecture.
2. For young people in education, DfE should continue to delegate the delivery of careers activity to schools and colleges, with a single organisation providing support and challenge. Consideration must be given to the most appropriate body to support 16- and 17-year-olds that are not participating in education or training.
3. For adults (18 and over), DfE's focus should be on adults in work, helping them into successful long-term careers (or series of careers), by supporting them to gain better education, training and skills. The relationship between adult careers advisers and local colleges should be strengthened.
4. DWP should provide careers information and guidance to people who are out of work or in low paid work in order to move more of this group away from universal credit and into good jobs as a priority - but the objectives and incentives of the short-term jobs support and longer-term careers advice should be complementary, not competitive.
5. For both young people and adults, government should have robust procedures to assure the quality of delivery of careers guidance.
6. Information about occupations and careers should be based on a single source of government-assured information and data which is transparent, accessible to all users

and third parties, and up to the minute. It should be accessible in different formats by different demographics and include information on the skills needs of employers and the economy, both locally and nationally.

7. The single information source should make it possible for people, and their advisers, to see the connection between skills needs (local and national) and the opportunities available to them to acquire those skills through publicly funded training. Local skills needs should reflect the local skills improvement plan.
8. There should be a balance between meeting local needs and national needs. Careers guidance should be clearly aligned with Local Skills Improvement Plans and co-ordinated with relevant devolved authorities. FE Colleges should be a core part of ensuring local careers and skills needs are met.
9. All those who may need or want to use government's careers guidance offer need to understand what is available and how they can access it. The career guidance offer needs to be clearly communicated, and to support this, all government's careers offer should be delivered under a common branding (Holman, 2022).

More recently, the House of Commons Education Select Committee has undertaken an inquiry into careers education, information, advice and guidance (launched in January 2022) and made 27 recommendations to government. The Conservative Government responded, recognising the importance of 'careers empowerment' - *'everyone to access impartial, lifelong careers advice and guidance, regardless of age or circumstance, equipping them with the necessary support to develop skills, advance their careers and boost long-term economic prosperity'* (para 8, p4). At the time, the government noted their ambition to develop a world leading and responsive careers system, that can take account of changes that are shaping the future of work. Their response set out key priorities for careers support: a single unified all-age careers system (one stop shop) to allow individuals to move seamlessly through their learning and career journey, supported with a new digital platform; skills, training and work experience giving parity of esteem to vocational and technical pathways and a stronger focus on high quality skills, training and work experience; and social justice so that everybody regardless of background can make the most of their talents, with a system that is built around the needs of all individuals (House of Commons Education Committee, 2023).

This indicated the likely direction of travel however we have yet to see what the new Labour administration will do<sup>37</sup>. But it resonated with other themes and suggestions for the future for careers guidance services indicated by the literature:

- A joined up and whole system strategy (cross-government) to reduce existing inequalities, coordinate employers, educators and careers professionals, and take account of local and national needs.
- Building on existing structures to provide stability.

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<sup>37</sup> The Labour manifesto promised to bring the National Careers Service and Jobcentre Plus together into a national jobs and careers service, a guarantee of two weeks of work experience for every young person and to improve careers advice, and to introduce a Youth Guarantee (Hooley, 2024)

- Improving access to services, supporting those from all backgrounds, equal opportunities to all in the workplace and increasing diversity and inclusion in employing organisations.
- Better provision of information (on careers, apprenticeships, qualifications etc) using digital technologies communicated via a national campaign.
- A focus on good work (as an outcome).
- Greater emphasis on experiential learning at work, and extending access to work experiences particularly for disadvantaged young people and employers in growth sectors (with additional funding), perhaps via virtual experiences to support those with challenges in gaining access (e.g. those in remote areas).
- Recognition of careers guidance as a profession.
- Focusing on key groups such as young people NEET, care leavers, support for all recent graduates including those from marginalised backgrounds (SAAB, 2022; House of Commons Education Committee, 2023; Hooley et al, 2023; APPG, 2023; CITB, 2023; City and Guilds, 2014).

## 4 Working with young people

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This chapter explores the current interventions and areas of good practice in supporting young people with careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG), and draws out findings for primary and early years settings.

### 4.1 Interventions for young people

Schools and colleges in England have a legal requirement to provide independent careers guidance to secondary aged students (11 to 18-year-olds) extending to age 25 for those with an education, health and care (EHC) plan. This requirement does not currently extend to primary or early years settings.

All secondary schools in England are expected to use the eight Gatsby Benchmarks to support this endeavour. These input measures place a focus on giving all students opportunities for work experience, guidance from a careers adviser, and engagement with employers, training providers and universities. The Gatsby Benchmarks are non-statutory requirements but provide a framework for how to meet this legal requirement.

Schools are provided with resources (e.g. a handbook) to support this and the government has provided funding to the Careers & Enterprise Company to support schools, particularly in working with employers, local authorities and other education and training providers (House of Commons Education Committee, 2023). Key initiatives funded through the Careers & Enterprise Company include the following and they are set to be extended to cover and support more schools:

- Careers Hubs - these bring together schools, colleges, employees and apprenticeship providers in local areas to provide support for schools to develop and improve their careers programme. They are located within Local Enterprise Partnerships or Local and Combined Authorities. They are a place-based network model.
- Careers Leader training – careers leaders are responsible and accountable for the planning and delivery of their school/college's careers programme and ensuring careers provision meets the Gatsby benchmark and government requirements; and the training (fully funded and flexible) aims to support careers leaders to be able to develop and improve their careers programmes.
- Enterprise Advisers – these are volunteers from the business community who help to demystify the world of work for young people in schools and colleges, working closely with education leaders in local schools and colleges and helping them build connections with local employers.

- Cornerstone Employers – these employers work their own networks to encourage employer involvement and to improve young people's access to career opportunities including employer encounters and workplace experiences. They are linked to and supported by Careers Hubs.

These initiatives and the related Gatsby Benchmarks (5: encounters with employers and employees; and 6: experiences of workplaces) indicate the importance placed on employer involvement in career education, placing a requirement for schools to connect with employers. So, although historically employers have had limited involvement, this has started to shift (Mcintosh and Yates, 2019). Schools and colleges appear to value working with employers but would prefer less frequent but more quality in-person experiences for their students (in preference to virtual offerings) (ISE, 2024).

## 4.2 Interventions for early years and primary settings

As noted, there is currently no legal requirement for primary schools or early years settings to provide careers guidance. However, the government is undertaking work to invest in career-related learning in primary schools by funding pilot work led by the Careers & Enterprise Company (House of Commons Education Committee, 2023). Current careers focused work with younger children tends to be referred to as career-related learning. Work by Godden et al (2024), although in Canada, highlights the importance of language and terminology and what it means to talk about careers. They argue that having a shared vocabulary is important (shared among educators, parents and children). A career is more than an occupation and that, in practice, daily experiences, activities and interactions in the classroom, the school and the playground can all contribute to early understanding of career.

### 4.2.1 Benefits

Overall career-related learning with young children has a range of interlinked benefits. Although it should be noted that the evidence is weak on the value of different activities (Kashefpakdel et al, 2018), and benefits tend to be noted by teachers rather than young people themselves, suggesting that surveys of primary aged children may not be the best method of assessing impact (The Research Base, 2021). Career-related learning in primary settings can:

- help ensure that the learning is consistent, accurate and more equal (providing equitable access to knowledge about future jobs and careers regardless of family background or gender);
- challenge implicit stereotypes and assumptions developed early on, and tackle unconscious bias and gender stereotyping;
- broaden/widen aspirations, improve understanding of the world of work, and broaden the range of sources used to find out about different jobs (although school and family remain the most common sources);

- bring learning life and increase engagement, improve self-efficacy, self-confidence and motivation (aiming high and staying positive), and improve attainment (improving attitudes towards school and attitudes towards learning);
- improve pupils' key/essential skills particularly creativity and teamwork);
- help prevent problems occurring in secondary education, such as disengagement from learning, diminished aspirations, low cultural capital, low skill levels and stalled social mobility;
- help link school subjects to the world of work, and enable children to better understand the relevance of the subject(s) they are studying;
- teach parents about career paths; and
- improve understanding among staff of how to prepare young people for the world of work, and improve embedding careers learning within the curriculum (Hughes and Hughes, 2022; Hooley, 2021; CDI, 2021; The Research Base, 2021; Chambers, 2020; Kashefpakdel 2018).

Career-related learning can therefore have a positive impact on social mobility and social justice, and lead to improved long-term outcomes. It is argued that careers education has even greater impact for economically disadvantaged young people (Percy and Mann, 2014; Percy and Amegah, 2021; Hooley, 2021; Hughes and Hughes, 2022): '*Career-related learning in primary schools shows children what is possible beyond what they might be familiar with in their immediate surroundings, and in so doing help improve social mobility*' (p4. Hughes and Hughes, 2022).

#### 4.2.2 Recognising the importance of starting early

There is an appetite for career-related learning for primary schools even in the face of delivery challenges and competing pressures (see below) (The Research Base, 2021). Primary school teachers tend to be positive about career-related learning and feel it should be started early (in the first year of primary school).

Research indicates that careers education is being delivered to pupils before the end of year 6 (DfE. School Snapshot Survey, IFF 2018; noted in CDI, 2021) and a substantial proportion of primary teachers feel confident in linking their subject to career routes (IFF Research, April Results, 2023<sup>38</sup>). A survey in 2018 of 250 primary school teachers and leaders in England undertaken by the charity Education and Employers in collaboration with the National Association of Head teachers (NAHT) and the Times Education Supplement (TES) found, when asked about at what age they believe career-related learning should start, almost half of all respondents (47%) felt that this should be early, i.e. at age 5 or earlier. Fewer, 21% thought this should start between 5-7 years; and fewer still thought this should be later, 13% when aged 7-9 years and 11% when aged 9-11

<sup>38</sup> 50% feel confident in linking their subject to career routes, but 30% didn't feel it was applicable to their job, and those working with older children were more confident than those working with younger children (at key stage 1). IFF research drawing on the School and College Panel.

years (Kashefpakdel, 2018). The importance of starting early is also reflected in the views of careers professionals notably in developing the Framework for Career Development for primary schools (CDI, 2021):

*'Children absorb ideas about careers from many sources including the work that they see in the home, the stories they read and the games that they play. Primary schools have a key role in ensuring that the more formal aspects of this learning provide opportunities for personal growth, enjoyment and challenge'* (p2, CDI, 2021).

#### 4.2.3 Current provision

Very little is understood about the provision (if any) of career-related activities in early years settings. More is known about activity in primary settings and indeed there has been some activity in primary schools to deliver career-related learning. This is despite no statutory requirement and also uncertainty around how to define and measure careers education and the skills that need to be prioritised for development within primary schools (Youth Unemployment Committee, 2021).

Career-related learning activities in primary schools tend to be organised by schools themselves, led by teaching staff but with support from others (including employers), often delivered through PSHE lessons, topic work or enterprise activities, and aimed at increasing children's understanding of the world of work and introduce them to future jobs. These activities involve networks and partnerships between schools, employers and parents including developing opportunities to explore and practice knowledge and skills required in the labour market; interventions to challenge stereotypes, widen aspirations and improve educational outcomes, and increase awareness including showing uses of curriculum subjects to different jobs; and CPD for schools and teachers to deliver career-related learning (research undertaken on behalf of Teach First, Kashefpakdel et al, 2019).

More specifically activities include:

- Role play, 'jobs corners' with costumes, props and information about different careers (with younger children).
- Discussing parents' jobs.
- Curriculum-linked activities (most common).
- Aspiration days.
- Numeracy and literacy activities.
- Enterprise days.
- Employer engagement such as what's my line, career insights talks, workplace visits (including bring your children to work days) and career carousels.
- Tutoring programmes with employers mentoring students in curriculum subjects (Kashefpakdel, 2018; Kashefpakdel et al, 2018; Millard et al, 2019).

**Specific examples that were delivered as part of the Our Future project (extract from Hughes and Hughes, 2022)**

- S.T.E.A.M. Futures - Destination Rail. A careers journey using the construction of a rail track to explore a range of jobs and responsibilities in and around the rail industry along the way.
- S.T.E.A.M. Futures – Power Your World. Learners work in teams to design and refine their own wind turbine blades whilst developing knowledge of renewable energy resources and careers in the green energy sector.
- S.T.E.A.M. Futures – Robotics Challenge. Learners are introduced to logistics and shipping with a focus on careers whilst working in teams to code robots to complete simple challenges and discover the importance of robots in the modern world.
- World of Opportunities. Learners rotate around a carousel of activities where they ‘travel’ to different parts of the city, region or world to use the equipment, practise their skills for success, and complete various job challenges to explore the geography of where jobs can take us.
- The Enterprise Challenge. Learners explore and develop the skills and attributes you need to become an entrepreneur, completing challenges and working in teams to develop and promote a unique product based on their interests and skills.
- Yes, I Can – Reducing Gender Stereotypes. Framed in a positive and constructive way, learners are exposed to activities and role models to inspire and encourage them not to rule out career options for themselves because of their gender.
- Farm to Fork. Children within SEND schools explore different jobs and activities that follow the journey from how milk is produced to making a cheese sandwich for themselves.
- Build a Business. Children within SEND schools explore small businesses founded by people with disabilities and will engage in open discussions as to how they could create products to sell in their own business based on their interests and skills.

#### **4.2.4 Challenges**

The research indicates several barriers to the delivery of career-related learning. These are: time constraints, too much focus on data-driven results, cost, and notably the (lack of) availability of employer volunteers and challenges around communication and scheduling time for teachers and employers to talk. Although some of the activities can be organised without volunteers from the world of work, many rely on or benefit from input from employers. Schools value the input from employers, but often connections with employers are informal and depend on relationships with individuals and when the individual (teacher or employer) moves on the link disintegrates. The reliance upon informal linkages becomes even more challenging in rural, isolated or socially deprived areas; and these places would benefit from more formal links with the local community (Kashefpakdel et al, 2018; Kashefpakdel, 2018).

#### **4.2.5 Guidance and support for primary schools**

There has been some recent support at government level for career-related learning in primary schools, and the DfE established the Primary Fund Programme which was managed by the Careers & Enterprise Company. This aimed to provide schools and

policymakers with evidence and examples of what works in career-related learning in primary education. The programme aimed to evaluate existing delivery and initiatives to see what could be scaled up, to develop and test new programmes and to build a toolkit (which became the Primary Careers Resources Platform) (The Research Base, 2021). This was followed most recently in 2023, with the DfE pilot programme 'Start Small: Dream Big', a new career-related learning programme aimed at children aged 5-8 years old (year 1 to 3 of primary school) that will be delivered by Teach First. It is a three-year programme beginning in disadvantaged areas to deliver training to help primary school teachers deliver a careers programme focused on careers in the curriculum and employer encounters, to increase aspirations and reduce gender stereotypical thinking. Careers introduced will include construction as well as those in STEM, green economy, technology, engineering, aerospace, and also creative industries, hospitality and healthcare<sup>39</sup> (Education Committee, 2023; Guardian, 2023).

The professional body for careers advisers, the Career Development Institute (CDI), has also developed resources with their Career Development Framework Handbook for primary schools<sup>40</sup> which draws on extensive research and consultation. The framework has six areas and for each area clarifies the skills, knowledge and attitudes individuals in primary schools need to have a positive career (with a focus on learning outcomes) and gives examples of curriculum activities and resources (for key stage 1 and 2). The six areas are: personal agency, knowledge and skill development, learner voice, good work, sustainability, and social justice.

Additionally, there have been some very successful projects including Our Future Derby which was led in partnership by Education and Employers (launched in 2019 and renamed Our Future in 2021). This provided specialist support for teachers and leaders to embed career-related learning into the curriculum, linked schools with inspiring role models from the world of work, and schools were given access to over 130 different career-related activities. The Education and Employers charity, working partnership with the National Association of Head Teachers, have since developed the Primary Futures online platform. This connects primary schools with diverse workplace volunteers who can take part in aspiration raising activities and talks about their jobs, provides videos to use in classrooms, and resources to help teachers plan activities and see how to connect the workplace with curriculum topics<sup>41</sup>.

#### 4.2.6 Conditions for success and what works well

Despite the benefits of early career learning, some teachers and many parents are concerned about careers input that they may view as directing children towards a particular career at a young age. Thus, careers education for young children should focus

<sup>39</sup> See [https://primary-careers.careersandenterprise.co.uk/news-and-events?\\_qf\\_=1\\*an3ois\\* ga\\*MTAyODU1Mjk0Ni4xNzE2OTE3MzQ4\\* ga\\_QJ8NK3JQTJ\\*MTcxNjkxNzM0OC4xLjAuMTcxNjkxNzM0OC4wLjAuMA..\\* ga\\_LR7HFCRMNM\\*MTcxNjkxNzM0OC4xLjAuMTcxNjkxNzM0OC4wLjAuMA](https://primary-careers.careersandenterprise.co.uk/news-and-events?_qf_=1*an3ois* ga*MTAyODU1Mjk0Ni4xNzE2OTE3MzQ4* ga_QJ8NK3JQTJ*MTcxNjkxNzM0OC4xLjAuMTcxNjkxNzM0OC4wLjAuMA..* ga_LR7HFCRMNM*MTcxNjkxNzM0OC4xLjAuMTcxNjkxNzM0OC4wLjAuMA)

<sup>40</sup> [https://www.thecdi.net/CDI/media/Write/Framework/CDI\\_124-Framework-Handbook\\_for\\_schools-v5.pdf](https://www.thecdi.net/CDI/media/Write/Framework/CDI_124-Framework-Handbook_for_schools-v5.pdf)

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.inspiringthefuture.org/primary-futures/>

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on broadening aspirations and helping them understand what skills and knowledge they may need to succeed, rather than guiding children towards a particular role or qualification (Chambers, 2020; Hooley, 2021; Mordal et al, 2020).

Evidence suggests that what is delivered in primary settings is and should be notably different to what is delivered in secondary settings:

*'The idea of career development in primary schools is easily misunderstood especially when looked at through the lens of secondary-school careers education programmes. Learning for career development in primary schools is an essential foundation for what happens later but it is also qualitatively different... Primary school learners are finding out who they are, who they possibly could become and where they might fit in the world! Their thinking advances from magical, association-based thinking to concrete, linear and sequence-based thinking' (p5, CDI, 2021).*

In terms of conditions for success:

- Career-related learning in primary schools works best when it is started early but with activities that are personalised and relevant to the age group. Millard et al (2019) suggest a funnelled approach where knowledge is broad and becomes more specific or narrower as the child moves through the education system to focus on their interests, choices, and abilities.
- It also needs to have a whole-school collaborative approach supported with good communication (involving all staff, all years and involves regular activities and exercises), to be driven from the senior leadership team (SLT) with support from classroom teachers and partner organisations, and involve staff with clearly defined roles such as career-related learning coordinator or key liaison for external organisations. This needs to be supported by good quality resources for schools to use and in-house capacity to deliver programmes. It is also important that staff receive CPD in career-related learning and the current labour market.
- Career-related learning needs to be embedded in the curriculum (with support to do so) to ensure that the information is relevant and suitable to pupils and supports their academic learning, and also to ensure that teachers can find the time and resources to deliver career learning.
- It needs support from employers for breadth and authenticity. Employers can provide real life role models to show young people a broad range of careers and address stereotypes about who different careers are suitable for, and bring real life, authentic experiences of the workplace. Employer engagement helps young people to start career exploration, enhance confidence and positive attitudes towards various career paths. It also supplements teacher activities and contextualises topics. Primary schools often invite employers and businesses into schools, and this is encouraged by government policy, but schools often need support from organisations to broker connections to employers. Employer volunteers may also need support as they may not have the necessary skills and experience to deliver effective activities.
- Working through partnerships can support delivery of effective career-related learning, with schools making use of local networks and careers hubs to access resources and

information and make connections with employers (overcoming challenges of informal linkages).

- Schools could also look to engage parents, and parents need to be equipped so they can discuss with their children what they have learnt at school about careers. Parents can be encouraged to talk about how people work and the value and contribution work makes to family and the community, celebrate the achievements of all members of the family, encourage children to think positively about their future and the roles they would like to fulfil, and encourage their children to think about a broad range of jobs 'even if they seem fanciful or unrealistic' (Godden et al, 2024; Kashefpakdel et al, 2018; Kashefpakdel et al, 2019; Hughes and Hughes, 2022; Chambers, 2020; The Research Base, 2021).

These echo many of the themes in literature around working with older children, and have been developed into a set of principles<sup>42</sup> established from the work of the Primary Fund programme.

#### 4.2.7 Looking to the future

Suggestions from the literature largely follow and extend the conditions for success or good practice identified (noted above), these included:

- Developing a long-term nationwide plan that measures and addresses skills gaps and shortages and includes growth and emerging sectors and skills for the future (e.g. digital skills), which could be central within schools' curriculum.
- Starting career-related education earlier, so young people can develop a deeper understanding of potential pathways and what they would entail. More specifically, this would require developing a strategy for engaging young children in career-related learning, to ensure that careers education is more equal and accurate; and using a framework similar to the Gatsby benchmarks to encourage and support the development of careers programmes for primary schools.
- Encouraging and supporting a whole school approach to career-related learning in primary schools, but with a named individual to take the lead and act as a key point of contact for employers (to reduce the pressure on all teachers).
- Ensuring a greater diversity of careers are represented through careers education and career-related learning, including those in the local labour market.
- Better careers education within teacher training (within Initial Teacher Education, induction and continuing professional development).
- Developing a better understanding of how careers interventions affect different age groups and to understand the aspirations of children according to their backgrounds

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<sup>42</sup> The principles are: make careers whole school, start early, embed careers into the curriculum, ensure all activities are personalised and relevant to the age group, ensure it is open to all, and involve employers and parents. See <https://primary-careers.careersandenterprise.co.uk/introduction/about-platform>

and where they live, through new research; and using this to fund and develop targeted careers education.

- Increasing the value of work experience and quality of work experiences and employer encounters. This would need better government promotion of ways to develop skills and experiences through extracurricular activities, opportunities and funding so that disadvantaged children do not miss out, encouraging diversity in employee representation in employer engagement, and regulations around work experience to ensure quality and relevance. Additionally, employers could collaborate (rather than compete) to provide school engagement (at secondary level but this could apply to primary level too), with employers coming together to support career-related learning and deliver career activities by sector (or skill or career pathway).
- Greater engagement of parents in career-related learning, supporting parents so they are equipped to discuss with their children what they have learned at school about careers (ISE, 2024; Hughes and Hughes, 2022; CEC, 2021; Doherty and Holt-White, 2021; Hooley, 2021; House of Lords Youth Unemployment Committee, 2021; Millard et al, 2019; Ette, 2016).

These suggestions tend to require action and change from government and key bodies rather than schools themselves. Mordal et al (2020) warn against burdening primary schools by requiring them to develop a career education specific curriculum, and instead it should be about raising awareness of existing activities and resources and how, with small adjustments, these activities can be more relevant to careers or used to support young children with career-related learning. Similarly, House of Lords Youth Unemployment Committee (2021) suggest that government should provide advice on how to deliver careers information, advice and guidance to primary school children.

### 4.3 Implications for the construction sector

Employers are key to providing breadth and authenticity to career-related learning in primary settings. However, schools often rely on informal linkages which are likely to be narrowly focused and fragile. In the primary space, there are resources being developed to support schools to reach out to employers and vice versa. Again, these resources provide an opportunity for CITB perhaps working with Education and Employers to raise the importance of construction employer engagement with primary schools and encourage involvement. CITB could produce a guide for employers wanting to get involved with ideas and examples of activities they could get involved in, signposting to useful organisations who can help link employers to schools, and hints and tips on how to deliver careers activities in primary schools. This could extend and build upon the Go Construct STEM Ambassadors model and resources. CITB could also help employers to form partnerships to collaborate and deliver construction sector career activities.



There may also be a role for the construction sector and CITB to advocate for change, extending formal career-related learning activities and education into primary settings, as working with primary school children ensures positive perceptions of construction are disseminated at the earliest opportunity.

## 5 Working with those on vocational pathways

This chapter explores the current interventions and good practice in providing those on vocational pathways with careers support. There are two ways to view careers guidance interventions for vocational pathways: providing careers guidance to support individuals to take a vocational pathway; and giving careers guidance to those actually on vocational pathways. The literature indicates that the focus has tended to be on the former, particularly due to the updated Provider Access Legislation (PAL) which took effect in January 2023. This specifies schools must provide at least six encounters with approved providers of apprenticeships and technical education for all their students.

### 5.1 Providing guidance about vocational pathways

#### 5.1.1 Current requirements

The key challenges for vocational pathways into sectors such as construction are the relative complexity of these routes compared to academic pathways (especially with the introduction of new qualifications such as T levels) and the bias towards academic routes in careers guidance in schools and colleges. As the House of Lords Youth Unemployment Committee (2021) noted, a child's way into work may include a traineeship, apprenticeship, Kickstart placement, T level, A level, GCSE, BTEC, university degree or degree apprenticeship and young people need to be aware of all these opportunities. They go on to assert that: *'no two young people are the same, and they all deserve equal support to prepare them for the job they aspire to, no matter their background, gender, ethnicity, whether they have additional needs, where they grew up, or which route they choose to take'*.

There are calls to increase the value of vocational skills, training and work experience among jobseekers including young people and employers which requires increased education and advice (Murchada and Murphy, 2016; Doherty and Holt-White, 2021). Research indicates young people in England are not receiving adequate opportunities to be informed about all their vocational options without bias towards particular routes, and where information about technical routes is provided to all students it improves take-up (summarised in DfE, 2023 but includes CEC, 2021 and UCAS, 2021; IPPR, 2019). The UK government is seeking to address this by strengthening the careers duty in secondary schools with the Provider Access Legislation<sup>43</sup> (set out in the Skills and Post-16 Education

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/fe-skills/provider-access-legislation/> ;  
[https://amazingapprenticeships.com/app/uploads/2022/10/Rapid-Read\\_What-is-the-provider-access-legislation-1.pdf](https://amazingapprenticeships.com/app/uploads/2022/10/Rapid-Read_What-is-the-provider-access-legislation-1.pdf)

Act 2022), and with the inclusion of careers guidance and PAL within Ofsted school inspections. This strengthens what is referred to as the Baker Clause (an Amendment to the Technical and Further Education Act 2017) which, in 2018, stipulated that schools must ensure a range of education and training providers have access to pupils from year 8 to 13 to inform them of technical education and apprenticeship opportunities. The Baker Clause aimed to overcome funding incentives in the system for schools to retain their pupils, help deliver parity of esteem for technical education, and ensure all young people could obtain all the information they need about the breadth of opportunities so they can make the right decisions about next steps. However, school compliance was low and technical education providers found it hard to access schools (IPPR, 2019).

Secondary schools and colleges now have a statutory requirement to give their students greater and meaningful exposure to providers of technical education, boosting awareness to alternatives to the more traditional higher education academic route and ensuring that all academic and vocational options can be explored equally (Amazing Apprenticeships, 2022; DfE, 2023; Guardian, 2023). The exposure to a range of providers and employers should allow young people to make a more informed decision about their career and education: *'By hearing directly from a range of providers, every pupil can build up a full picture of the options available and consider how the opportunity to study or train in different ways, and in different environments, might suit their skills, interests and aptitudes. This will lead to better-informed choices and help to reduce the risk of young people dropping out of courses'* (p.42. DfE, 2023).

These providers include independent training providers, FE colleges, universities and employer providers. Schools and colleges must ensure that year 7 to 13 students are provided with an opportunity to learn about technical education and apprenticeships from a range of these types of providers. The new guidance sets parameters around the duration and content of this exposure:

- Two encounters for pupils during the 'first key phase' (year 8 or 9) that are mandatory for all pupils to attend.
- Two encounters for pupils during the 'second key phase' (year 10 or 11) that are mandatory for all pupils to attend.
- Two encounters for pupils during the 'third key phase' (year 12 or 13) that are mandatory for the school to put on but optional for pupils to attend.

During these encounters pupils must be given information about the provider and what learning or training with them is like, about the technical education qualifications and apprenticeships they offer, and information about the careers that these might lead to. Pupils must also be given opportunities to ask questions and for providers to respond. Schools are also encouraged to also provide complementary encounters (e.g. at parents evening) but these don't count towards the legal requirement (DfE, 2023).

This new legislation will become a key mechanism to further help learners understand and take-up, not just apprenticeships, but wider technical education options such as T Levels and Higher Technical Qualifications.

## 5.1.2 Other current activities

### Outreach

A key area of activity supporting the provision of guidance about vocational pathways and encouraging take up and diversity in participation has been the outreach work of employers. Employer activities include: virtual events, school visits, attend careers fairs, mentoring, work experience and employability days, act as STEM ambassadors (the Go Construct STEM Ambassador programme is linked to the broader STEM ambassador scheme), distribute general marketing materials and develop social media content. They aim to reach a diverse audience through these activities and try to reflect and promote diversity of sectors. These activities are often developed and delivered in collaboration with careers services, youth organisations, local community groups and charities, and the Careers & Enterprise Company. However, employers do face challenges with outreach including students' fatigue with virtual interactions and employers needing to work around school timings and context to tailor their material/input (Doherty and Holt White, 2021; City and Guilds, 2018).

### Guidance and support

Schools and colleges can access support to fulfil their PAL duty, and employers can also access support to engage with schools and colleges. A key organisation is the Careers & Enterprise Company, and their network of Careers Hubs. However, there are other organisations with a particular focus on apprenticeships and vocational pathways. It should be noted that some of these have or may change with the incoming Labour Government. For example, the functions of IfATE (the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education) will pass to a new body, Skills England<sup>44</sup>, an 'arms-length' body aiming to unify the skills landscape, shape technical education to respond to skills needs, and support drives for growth across the country

The Apprenticeship Support and Knowledge (ASK) programme funded by DfE was launched in 2016 and has been providing free support to educational establishments in England for a number of years. It aims to increase awareness of apprenticeships and T levels among teachers, careers advisers, governors, students and parents, and works with schools and colleges. The programme offers online resources, CPD workshops for staff and activities and workshops for students which are delivered by ASK delivery partners (local experts) either virtually or in-person. Student focused activities include: awareness assemblies, apprenticeship registration and application workshops, mock assessment centre workshops, mock interview sessions, careers fairs, and career starter apprenticeship sessions. Student focused resources include posters, classroom activity packs, videos and subject guides (ASK Brochure 2023/24<sup>45</sup>).

<sup>44</sup> See <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/skills-england>

<sup>45</sup>

[https://assets.ctfassets.net/8kbr1n52z8s2/5W0m9E8SEI75YXA1m0ZJ2O/6df8d4be147985bed0f03765ad540a70/ASK\\_Brochure\\_2324.pdf](https://assets.ctfassets.net/8kbr1n52z8s2/5W0m9E8SEI75YXA1m0ZJ2O/6df8d4be147985bed0f03765ad540a70/ASK_Brochure_2324.pdf)

The organisation Amazing Apprenticeships also offers support and guidance, working with schools, colleges and employers in England to raise awareness of the benefits of apprenticeships and technical education and improve access. They provide a range of resources and activities for schools and colleges (including the Apprenticeship Ambassador Network, individual case studies, materials on work experience and preparing for work experience, how to search and apply for apprenticeships, how to promote apprenticeships and technical education, and information about higher technical qualifications), work with employers to support widening participation in their recruitment to apprenticeships, and have partnered with a wide range of organisations from a variety of sectors and localities to develop and deliver projects including Dunelm, BBC, Royal Air Force, and Checkatrade (offering the Try a Trade Programme<sup>46</sup>). Through their Time for Change and Genie programmes they explore and tackle challenges faced by diverse and disadvantaged applicants to apprenticeships to improve access to apprenticeships<sup>47</sup>.

DfE too are working with employers through employer engagement teams and have established a T level employer ambassador network:

*'We know that young people resonate with those who know what their lives are like, so we are scaling the voluntary network of employers and apprentices to be engaged with every secondary school and college by March 2026. We are working with CEC and ASK to achieve this' (House of Commons Education Committee, p.8.)*

The department have developed the T level action plan to raise the profile and improve access and take-up of T levels and of industry placements with employers, and have instigated the national T level celebration week. They have also launched the Skills for Life national campaign. Skills for Life brings together education and training pathways for young people post-16 which will simplify the skills system, and it also includes an employer strand promoting the value of investing in skills (House of Commons Education Committee, 2023; DfE, 2024). However, it should be noted that there are concerns about the capacity for employers to provide training and vocational programmes, and particularly to support the diversity of programmes and new routes (Foster et al, 2018, Williams et al, 2020). This leads to a substitution effect with increases in some programmes leading to a decrease in others, rather than an overall increase in the numbers on vocational pathways.

## 5.2 Providing guidance to those on vocational pathways

Young people in colleges, regardless of whether on an academic or vocational or technical education pathway, receive career guidance. It would appear that FE colleges have no legal requirement to provide independent careers guidance to those aged over 18 (or over 25 for those with an education, health and care plan) and independent training

<sup>46</sup> <https://amazingapprenticeships.com/try-a-trade/>

<sup>47</sup> <https://amazingapprenticeships.com/time-for-change-webinar-series-back-for-2023-24/#:~:text=Now%20in%20its%20fourth%20year,mental%20health%20and%20much%20more>

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providers are not covered by the statutory duty at all, although DfE does encourage them to follow the statutory guidance as good practice. This means that apprentices and older learners on vocational pathways may not be receiving career guidance whilst with their provider. This is important to note, as careers support can help boost retention on learning programmes and progression into sustained destinations (CEC, 2024).

The Careers & Enterprise Company (2024) have produced a guide for colleges and training providers setting out how the Gatsby Benchmarks can be used to support apprentices with careers guidance, with suggestions and innovative approaches for apprenticeship provision. However, this is aimed at those supporting young people. CEC working with the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) found that training providers do undertake career guidance activities, but this is inconsistent across the sector, can be fragmented and not given sufficient importance (and providers can be wary of upsetting employer relationships). The guide also notes how Ofsted found that apprentices may not understand the opportunities available in the careers they are interested in. Additionally, vocational learners are strongly influenced by their parents, but FE colleges and training providers tended not to engage parents in their careers programmes (CEC, 2024).

### 5.2.1 Current activities

FE colleges and training providers do provide career guidance and tend to use the Gatsby benchmarks to structure and (to some extent) monitor their careers programmes and provision. Careers guidance could be included in the curriculum as a standalone subject (generally within the tutorial programme), as part of the subject curriculum or vocational programme (delivered by teachers/tutors and threaded throughout) or through extra-curricular activities. Often sixth-form colleges delivered careers guidance via tutors but FE colleges tended to use a central careers team, and many colleges had a (at least one) trained careers adviser responsible for holding personal guidance interviews. The careers guidance received could depend on the learner pathway. In sixth-form colleges, the careers programme tends to be organised around progression to university but careers guidance for apprentices was variable. Apprentices often didn't know what was available or found it hard to engage with careers support which meant they could be unaware of options outside their current pathway (CEC, 2024; Ofsted, 2023a).

Apprentices can receive careers guidance through their apprenticeship provider or their employer, and vocational learners can learn a great deal about work and particular careers while on placement. Experiences of the workplace including work experience or industry placements were important in helping people identify and decide on future career paths, develop sector specific skills and knowledge, and develop confidence and essential workplace skills. However, this can mean that the distinction between careers guidance and the vocational curriculum can be blurred, and again this could mean that careers guidance received may not go beyond the current role with the current employer (e.g. to consider alternative options). Some providers also noted how changes to working practices as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, such as more people working remotely, meant it could be challenging to arrange for in-person work experience. This has led to

some colleges and training providers offering hybrid work experience involving some virtual elements (Ofsted, 2023a).

The guidance received via vocational programmes and apprenticeships tended to be dependent on the industry expertise of the staff, their knowledge of training needs for the sector and future skills needs. Their expertise also provided links to the sector. Some colleges supported maintenance of sector expertise by allowing staff to attend courses or industry days (to keep industry knowledge up to date and understand emerging jobs and technologies). Generally, learners valued the support, expertise and personalised advice of their tutors, trainers or teachers, and were strongly influenced by them (Ofsted, 2023a).

Specific and standalone activities included specific careers events and visits including industry weeks, careers fairs, and encounters with employers. Plus, activities aimed at:

- giving up to date advice on the courses, pathways and qualifications for different careers;
- helping with preparation for job applications by developing understanding of job applications, CV writing and job interviews;
- providing up to date information about local, regional and national LMI skills gaps; and
- giving learners information about professional behaviours required for specific careers (Ofsted, 2023a).

Colleges and training providers also worked with a wide range of employers and local networks (including Careers Hubs) as part of their careers programme and gathered extensive LMI. This keeps them up to date with and feed into local skills agenda (including identifying sector specific skills and behaviours) and enables them to use the skills needs information to develop curriculum content. Many providers also worked with learners before and at enrolment to check they were applying for the right course for their career aspirations (with signposts to other options if they could not meet their learning/training needs), activities here included taster days, experience days, assessing career aspirations at interview, and having a course induction period. However, some colleges and training providers found it difficult to access schools to deliver 'encounters' (as per Gatsby benchmark) with schools wanting to 'keep their pupils' and some felt schools were not promoting technical and vocational routes well enough (often lacking understanding of these pathways, apprenticeships and T levels in particular, and having a bias towards academic pathways) (Ofsted, 2024).

## 5.2.2 What works well

The Careers & Enterprise Company is developing resources to support colleges and training providers to develop their careers provision for apprentices. They have set up Further Education & Skills Connect, a virtual Community of Practice of providers to share best practice, and also offer free resources for providers to support young people. CEC have also published a guide for colleges and training providers outlining effective approaches to careers guidance for apprentices (CEC, 2024). The guide takes each of

the Gatsby benchmarks and sets out what best practice looks like for providers, employers and learners. The good practice for employers includes:

- Providing intelligence on skills needs.
- Commit time to careers events.
- Provide apprentices with information about career prospects and pathways (at onboarding and throughout).
- Provide apprentices with information or experience of different roles in the sector.
- Set up a mentor/buddy system to support personal and career development.
- Provide opportunities for additional training and opportunities to develop beyond the apprenticeship role.
- Support membership of sector/trade bodies and opportunities to attend trade fairs/events.
- Facilitate meeting with suppliers and customers.
- Organise different site visits and provide opportunities for apprentices to move around departments/functions and learn about different roles and working environments (smaller employers could offer day release or swaps with another employer).
- Support shadowing of different job roles/employees.
- Engage in next step conversations with learners and plan steps post apprenticeship (CEC, 2024).

Whereas the Ofsted review of current practice indicates that effective practice for FE colleges and training providers was indicated by:

- expert staff keeping up to date with their industry;
- providers offering a wide range of events across the year covering academic and vocational pathways;
- tailoring careers events to sectors that learners are interested in;
- enabling learners to engage meaningfully with employers and ask questions;
- following up events with employer trips, further work in lessons or discussions with tutors; and
- offering effective work placements that align work experience to learners' courses or career aspirations, that are carefully designed and sequenced and aligned to course content, have clear objectives, of sufficient duration, involve a breadth of activities (to help learners decide the areas they are most interested, and learn more about the field than one specific career), and that learners are prepared before-hand (Ofsted, 2023a).

DfE are also working in this space to make sure students, parents and employers are clear about progression opportunities from vocational education and qualifications such as T levels, including progressing to apprenticeships, higher education and higher technical education. IfATE, working with industry experts, have published a set of profiles on their website that identify some of the progression opportunities, but these are not

exhaustive. These include profiles for the three T levels in construction<sup>48</sup>. DfE are exploring accelerated pathways from T levels to enable quicker completion of apprenticeships in recognition of prior learning gained during T levels. This includes a pilot scheme with CITB for high achieving T level graduates in Carpentry & Joinery. DfE are also working with the Association of Colleges to support providers with information and guidance that will help them advise their vocational and technical students with options for progression (DfE, 2024). Additionally, the DfE's Taking Teaching Further programme encourages and supports industry professionals to train as FE teachers, and the Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) allows for providers to bid for funding to support workforce industry exchange including industry placements for further education teachers. Both initiatives recognise the importance of expert staff with up-to-date industry knowledge (House of Commons Education Committee, 2023).

## 5.3 Looking to the future

Suggestions for moving forward, from the literature, were somewhat limited and not specifically careers focused (rather focused on improving awareness of, access to and experiences of vocational pathways) but included:

- universities improving their outreach and activities to promote degree apprenticeships through collaboration with employers;
- employers using some of their (unspent) Apprenticeship Levy for pre-apprenticeship programmes and other outreach to improve access to vocational pathways;
- more flexible funding (including industry and apprenticeship levies) to support all forms of career learning and development, in order to adapt to the changing labour market landscape;
- more flexible programmes (e.g. apprenticeship structures) to make the transitions from education to training easier (perhaps following the German model); and
- campaigns to raise the profile of industry placements with employers to ensure there are sufficient placements available, and employers collaborating to provide solutions to difficulties in organising work experience or placements (sharing out the commitments required) (ISE, 2024; House of Commons Education Committee, 2023; Work Foundation and City and Guilds Group, 2018; Doherty and Holt-White, 2021).

## 5.4 Implications for the construction sector

Employer outreach activities can help raise the profile of vocational pathways and can help schools and colleges meet their Provider Access Legislation requirement for provider encounters (Gatsby benchmark 7) and also their requirement for encounters with employers and employees (Gatsby benchmark 5). Employers may feel more comfortable working with older pupils and with staff and



<sup>48</sup> <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/qualifications/t-levels/t-level-progression-profiles/>

schools and colleges should be highly responsive to offers from construction sector employers, particularly those offering vocational and technical training and pathways, of school visits, mentoring, or work experience. However, employer encounters need to be meaningful, and CITB could provide support for employers on what this means in practice and about the information they should provide (building on the resources offered through the Go Construct STEM Ambassadors programme). CITB could also produce guidance and share best practice on outreach activities, particularly on how to overcome challenges with arranging in-person workplace visits, working with school timetables, and tailoring input to school and learner needs.

There are a number of organisations offering support and resources to schools and colleges to raise awareness of and support access to apprenticeships and T levels including the ASK programme and Amazing Apprenticeships. Partnering and engaging with these organisations will offer opportunities for the construction sector to provide sector specific information, case studies and resources, and for sector employers and employees to be involved in their networks such as the Apprenticeship Ambassador Network and T level employer ambassador network.

Employers play a critical role in exposing those on vocational pathways to information about career opportunities through work and work placements – helping them identify and decide on career paths, develop sector and workplace skills and confidence. Those on vocational pathways are often people who fall outside of the duty of providers to deliver career guidance and so may get limited or no formal careers support as part of their course. Construction sector employers can therefore provide careers support through the workplace. However, to support the wider sector to address skills shortages it will be important for construction employers to offer wider insights i.e. beyond their current role, department or employer to show the breadth of prospects and pathways. This may be challenging and uncomfortable for some (particularly smaller) employers and so CITB could play a role here to facilitate and create networks to allow employers to organise visits to other sites, working environments and employers (with a swap system). The CEC guide provides pointers for good practice and CITB could help to promote and or even adapt this for construction employers.

Construction employers can also: support standalone careers activities such as careers fairs and industry weeks; engage with mentoring networks to encourage under-represented groups, activities currently promoted via the Go Construct STEM Ambassadors programme (Ahmed, 2008); work with FE and training provider staff to keep their sector knowledge up-to-date by offering visits or industry days and generally providing information on local skills needs (current and upcoming) to support curriculum development; and support the development careers materials such as IfATE's progression profiles.

## 6 Working with adults outside of the labour market

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This chapter explores the current interventions and suggestions for good practice in providing those outside the labour market with careers support which often takes place within or alongside employment support.

As noted above, careers support for adults (in or outside of the labour market) is provided in England by the National Careers Service (funded and managed by the Department for Education) and the Department for Work and Pensions jobcentres and initiatives, supplemented by targeted services from local bodies and charities and paid-for private services. In Scotland and Wales, careers support has a more visible presence: in Scotland it is provided by Skills Development Scotland with local centres (and online and telephone support), and in Wales by Careers Wales through local centres. However, in all three nations, employment support plays a role in careers provision and indeed often takes precedence over career provision. This means that careers support can be hard to identify as a discrete and separate activity and can be deprioritised in the context of the strong policy focus on getting people (back) into work and off benefits. Given the complexity and volume of literature, this chapter is largely focused on what happens in England.

### 6.1 Challenges

A consultation on the current provision for and infrastructure of adult career guidance in England found adult careers guidance is inconsistent, fragmented, lacks cohesion and is unclear to users; and that it involves various stakeholders (training providers, charities, national government, national careers service, local authorities, employers and trade unions) with no common thread of activity. It noted how in England the National Careers Service is central but that the Department for Education and the Department of Work and Pensions incorporate elements of career guidance for adults in their work and programmes, but there is little coordination across these activities or departments, and confusion about their respective roles (e.g. National Careers Service advisers and Jobcentre Plus work coaches). Other criticisms or weaknesses included the focus on targets and seeking quick, measurable outcomes which shifts support from personal skills to employability; a lack of highly qualified staff (in contrast to career services for young people), and limited progression and CPD for careers staff; and challenges engaging with the adult audience (Pye Tait Consulting, 2022; Holman, 2022).

IES's Commission for the future of employment support (Campbell et al, 2023; Wilson et al, 2022) highlights how employment support in the UK covers 5 key roles: job preparation, matching and brokerage support; specialist support for those further from

work; administration of social security benefits; employer facing support and services; and co-ordination and collaboration with other public services, industry and employer bodies. It does not specifically cover careers information, advice and guidance. The Commission identified a number of issues in the current system which includes employment support, benefits administration, and career guidance under the responsibility of the Department of Work and Pensions' Jobcentre Plus. Many of these issues were longstanding, these included:

- A narrow focus of employment services with many of those who would benefit from support services, not aware of them or not eligible. This includes individuals who may be outside the labour force entirely such as people with long-term health conditions, older people, parents, and students.
- Limited access to personalised and well-tailored support tailored to an individual's needs and context.
- An 'any job' mindset that may be disempowering jobseekers with a focus on meeting commitments instead of finding good and suitable work.
- A focus on compliance and threat of sanction.
- Poor coordination of skills and careers.
- A lack of support for self-employment.

This means the employment service has become an administrative service and a mechanism for getting people into work and leads to few people engaging with the service. Analysis by the OECD shows the UK to have the least well used employment service in Europe, despite there being a need for support, with vulnerable groups finding it hard to gain a foothold in the labour market and those experiencing long periods of unemployment (including young people NEET) suffering scarring effects which lead to harmful impacts on later life such as lower future income levels, employability, job satisfaction, happiness and health. Career guidance is key in supporting people into and back into work but does the current system really provide this? (Campbell et al, 2023; Wilson et al, 2022).

## 6.2 Current interventions

### 6.2.1 The National Careers Service

The National Careers Service is central to the adult career guidance landscape in England (Pye Tait, 2022). It provides face to face, telephone and online support for adults aged 19 and above in England, this is available to all (and thus not exclusively for those outside the labour market). It is delivered by regional contractors and local sub-contractors and so can deliver guidance to fit local needs. The service provides support to understand local job markets, search for and apply for jobs, CV writing and completing application forms, and interview techniques; support with searching for courses or training and funding to support learning, and finding volunteering opportunities; and also support to identify key strengths and skills, explore career options and training routes, and develop a plan for career jobs. The online service offers digital tools including Explore

Careers, the Skills Health Check, and Find a Course, as well as webchat (Albone et al, 2023), but these will rely on individuals having the digital skills and access to engage with them<sup>49</sup>. Approximately half of referrals to the service come from Jobcentre plus (Holman, 2022).

Overall, the customer profile of National Careers Service users (across all channels) indicates males are more prevalent than females, those with a disability accessing the service have been falling but those over 50 and those in work have been increasing. Whereas those using the online service (only) tend to be highly qualified and in work. Most users hear about the service through Jobcentre Plus and the most common reason for contacting the National Careers Service is to support progression into employment. Help with CV writing is therefore often the starting point to provide advice. Most customers have just one interaction with the service (with one telephone enquiry or one meeting with an adviser) and this is increasing. However, those with longer periods of unemployment (at least six months), or at risk of unemployment or aged 50 plus were more likely to have more than one meeting with an adviser (Albone et al, 2023). Feedback indicates that the service has priority groups that it supports and does not have the capacity to provide a high-quality service to all adults, and that many adults are unaware of the services or think they would not be eligible for support. This means many adults seek support elsewhere and leads to inconsistent provision and quality (Pye Tait, 2022).

## 6.2.2 Employment Services

The literature provides examples of interventions supporting long term unemployed people into work and these mainly fall under the remit of employment support and the responsibility of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). These tend to be focused on delivering immediate employment outcomes rather than long-term career planning. Generally, employment support is provided through Jobcentre Plus which provides resources for job search and information about training opportunities but also administers claims for benefits. It is important to note that this is not specifically careers support and generally is not referred to as careers support. Examples of this wider support are noted below, and recently this has been focused on supporting those (most) affected by the pandemic.

- During and since the pandemic, DWP introduced a range of interventions to help people back to work and also in response to increasing levels of economic inactivity

<sup>49</sup> ONS analysis indicates 10% of the UK adult population have either never used the internet or at least not used it in the last three months, and 12% of adults had limited basic digital skills (data from 2018) – see <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetandsocialmediausage/articles/exploringtheuksdigitaldivide/2019-03-04>. Whereas analysis by the Good Things Foundation, the digital inclusion charity, suggests that between 15% and 20% of UK citizens, children or households are affected by limited digital access and between 15% and 30% are missing digital skills for everyday life. – see <https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/policy-and-research/research-and-evidence/research-2024/digital-inclusion-datasets>. Most recently, a Lloyds bank survey (published in 2023) found 18% of UK adults lacked the essential digital skills needed for the workplace – see <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cdp-2024-0073/>

via its Plan for Jobs. This was introduced in 2020 in response to the pandemic and offered support: to incentivise firms to keep furloughed workers, to help people to find work and gain the skills needed to get a job, to support sectors most affected by the pandemic, and support for creating jobs. Plan for Jobs included programmes such as the Kickstart scheme which offered paid placements for young people at risk of long-term unemployment; Skills Bootcamps offering short courses to those aged 19 and above to build digital and technical skills and an interview with a local employer; and the sector-based work academy programme offering work experience.

- Another intervention has been the Restart scheme aimed at the longer-term unemployed (initially aimed Universal Credit claimants out of work for at least 12 months than extend to at least 9 months) and providing up to 12 months of enhanced and tailored job support to find local employment.

A further intervention was the New Futures programme, which supported workers looking to change career and reskill as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. This was funded by the Covid-19 Support Fund, a fund developed by the UK insurance and long-term savings industry (so independent from government). It has involved four place-based pilots (Edinburgh, Belfast, Wales and Tees Valley) to test different approaches to support that would: reflect need of local labour markets and the skills of local populations, be tailored and targeted, focus on sustainable employment and careers, and involve a training offer to develop technical skills combined with high quality careers advice and coaching. It ran until the end of September 2023 and the majority of those who participated were out of work when they registered for the programme. The approaches included: a Technology Employment Academy to train and support people to work in the tech sector (offering training, a guaranteed job interview and aftercare); linking individuals with a Vocational Training Academy offering courses in a variety of sectors (offering training, a guaranteed job interview, and continued support from career advisors); establishing a range of skills academies to understand local skills demand and supply and match people to available job opportunities and provide intensive career coaching alongside skills training; and supporting targeted and tailored training to support women to switch careers into the digital sector, and to address barriers to training and employment such as childcare and transport. Employers were involved across the pilots in various ways, in designing the approach, delivering careers sessions, and providing work placements – their involvement helped participants learn about a range of careers and skills required, and provided networking opportunities. However, employers did not always understand the career change goals of the programme and didn't always offer job opportunities for programme completers, and level of interest and commitment of individual employers could be volatile (Egglestone et al, 2024).

The IES Commission (Campbell et al, 2023) notes how most of those who are out of work are not unemployed and may not even be on benefits, and so support for these people is patchy and inconsistent, with funding winding down. This can be delivered through national specialist support such as support for disabled people, through localised provision or through other services such as health services.

## 6.3 Good practice

Research indicates the most effective support for adults is/or should be:

- Personalised, person-centred and holistic, offering tailored and wrap-around support to help individuals overcome complex barriers. This would include additional services and funding to help those outside the labour market to access work such as access to quality work experience, and mental health support; and that those who would benefit from the support are involved in its design. An OECD study (Dean, 2013) identified two exemplary local and personalised support services. Gloucester Works in the UK, aimed to improve the engagement of workless and low-skilled individuals through a coordinated local approach working with employers and providing employment skills, bespoke training and support to identify and tackle personal barriers to employment and support and further training once in work to enable progression. Bladerunners in Canada, which provides 24-7 support for at risk young adults with support across employment, health, education, social services, housing, transport and access to training and counselling, with a dedicated coordinator and no time limit on the availability of support. However, both programmes faced funding pressures and Gloucester works is no longer operating. The recent New Futures pilot also highlighted how staff saw personalised support and holistic wrap-around support as an important part of delivery, establishing trust and helping participants to overcome individual barriers. Also, that effective support depended on tailoring career guidance to the individual, with participants appreciating careers staff taking time to understand them and their transferable skills (Egglestone et al, 2024). The IES Commission on the Future of Employment Support also highlights how effective support involves services tailored to people's specific needs and has effective partnerships in place with other services. It points to strong partnerships between Jobcentre Plus and organisations delivering other support, of local authorities coordinating services including co-located employment hubs, 'no wrong door' referral models, and engaging with people via housing, health and other services (Campbell et al, 2023).
- Independent (impartial and free from institutional bias) and involves honest brokers, particularly when connecting unemployed people with the world of work (Watts, 2010, quoted in Dean, 2013). Community and local organisations can link individuals to programmes, acting as brokers, but these need to be independent so they can truly source the support that is needed and not just those services they can provide (Froy and Giguere, 2010, quoted in Dean, 2013). Equally, government provided support needs to be impartial, and arguably this could be challenging given the focus on achieving (any, regardless of quality) immediate employment outcomes.
- Local, so has an understanding of the local area, engages local leadership in delivery and local involvement in design, and is provided locally. This will help services to be more joined up and specific to the needs of the local area, reduce confusion, and gives confidence to employer involvement (Dean, 2013; Campbell et al, 2023). Careers advice is most valued when advisers are perceived to have a strong understanding of the local labour market and connections to employers, thus able to provide support tailored to local vacancies (Egglestone et al, 2024).

- Communicated and promoted to the wider adult population so that they are aware of the services including online resources (Pye Tait, 2022).
- Aimed at helping employers to be more inclusive, with employment services and wider stakeholders helping employers make their recruitment, retention and progression more inclusive and thus improve access to work for disadvantaged groups (Campbell et al, 2023). Examples include the Gender Friendly Nursery in Glasgow which provides training and resources to staff to help reduce gender stereotyping; the Glenmorangie Company's approach to recruiting apprentices (focusing on attitude and potential rather than experience), their gender balanced policies (support for all new parents), and unconscious bias training for all employees (SAAB, 2022); and the activities of Age Scotland who offer age inclusion workshops for managers and unconscious bias workshops (with construction employers such as Mackenzie Construction taking part<sup>50</sup>). However, challenges to working effectively with employers are a lack of understanding of employers needs and how they work, poor alignment between employment and skills support making it difficult to offer a joined-up approach, lack of awareness among employers of the support they can access, and the onus falling on employers to navigate the different systems and services available (Campbell et al, 2023).

A comprehensive international study is currently underway, commissioned by the Gatsby Foundation, to understand what good practice in adult career guidance looks like in other countries and to see what the UK can learn and what practices could work in the UK context.

## 6.4 Looking to the future

Good quality careers guidance for adults (those 18 and older) is important for individuals and the economy, but the system needs improving and simplifying (Holman, 2022). Sir John Holman, an adviser to DfE, recommends that different bodies should be responsible for different needs of adults: with DfE focusing on adults in work to gain successful long-term careers by supporting them to gain better education, training and skills; and DWP providing careers information and guidance to people who are out of work or in low paid work to help them into good jobs. However, both DfE and DWP need to build on joint ways of working to allow for closer cooperation in delivering jobs and careers guidance for adults, and to align services with local policies and priorities. Also to review the employment and careers support offer for 18-year olds (moving to adult from young person) (Holman, 2022).

The IES Commission (Campbell et al, 2023) has to date identified 5 priorities for the reform of employment services, including providing a one stop service that joins up employment, careers and skills support through better-integrated services and a transformed digital offer. The work of the Commission found strong support for a more flexible and adaptable employment service for people through all stages of their working lives, and that combines high quality careers guidance with opportunities to reskill and

<sup>50</sup> <https://be-st.build/news/be-better-an-equity-and-inclusion-spotlight-4/>

support to find work. Recommendations and suggestions from the review of adult career guidance included: an all-ages service to guide individuals throughout their lives, an integrated service for education and careers support in one place, having a larger network of highly qualified careers professionals (with improved pay), improved coordination and communication between all adult career guidance stakeholders, improved digital offer with interactive elements, better promotion and communication to adults of available support, and having a named career practitioner to support an individual (Pye Tait, 2022).

The work of the New Futures pilot focused on career change for adults, also recommended joined up support, that career change provision incorporates personalised tailored support alongside careers advice and guidance, targeted training provision and wrap-around personal support (including once in work if needed). Other recommendations and learning from New Futures are also relevant for wider careers interventions and programmes for supporting adults. These include: that practical job getting support is provided alongside tailored careers advice and guidance; using multiple media and methods of engagement to reach and recruit participants but to ensure in-person support is provided as part of the mix; being clear about how adults can be supported and who can be supported (e.g. meeting eligibility requirements); thinking about flexibility of delivery to increase accessibility; and ensuring employer engagement (Egglestone, 2024).

## 6.5 Implications for the construction sector

Who and how to help is challenging. The role of employers in careers guidance support for adults is harder to identify than when working with individuals in the education system (essentially a captive audience), and the potential adults to target/work with are also harder to identify and to access given their diversity, dispersion and distance from the labour market, and often complex mix of needs and support. Additionally, the careers systems across the UK are different and in flux and may well change.



Key opportunities (in England) appear to be to work with the National Careers Service, or the new incarnation of this, to ensure it has up to date information about career pathways into and within the construction industry (reflecting changing skills needs and technologies), and for employers to work with local service providers to support their understanding of local skills needs (this may mean inputting into Local Skills Improvement Plans). It will also be important for the sector to be aware of national employment support programmes and projects that provide opportunities for employers to engage with adults (although these have tended to be aimed at long-term unemployed rather than the economically inactive). Local programmes and projects may offer greater opportunities for construction employers to engage with a wider group of adults, which may help them deliver a better diversity of their intake, however it will be challenging to be aware of all relevant activities at regional and local levels. Working in partnership with local community organisations may help.

Some support and funding (via employment support programmes and initiatives) may be available for employers, to help them be more inclusive in their approaches to recruitment, retention and progression. Employers tend to be unaware of the support they

can access and CITB could help by collating and maintaining a directory of services, building on and harnessing the work of the New Entrant Support Team.

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