



Career Guidance for Adults: Evidence gathering

Summary

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Pye Tait Consulting
Royal House, 110 Station
Parade, Harrogate
HG1 1EP
01423 509 433
info@pyetait.com
www.pyetait.com



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Report prepared by:

Pye Tait Consulting



Registered in England, Company No: 04001365, VAT No: 755 8312 14.

Registered office: Royal House, 110 Station Parade, Harrogate, North Yorkshire, HG1 1EP

Tel: 01423 509433

Email m.pye@pyetait.com

Website: www.pyetait.com

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Background to the study

To date most of Gatsby's work in careers has focused on young people, but of course career decisions do not stop once someone leaves education at 18. They are taken throughout our lives and are crucial not only to our own well-being and prosperity, but also to that of our local community and national economy. The Gatsby Foundation see careers guidance for adults as a key means of tackling unemployment, underemployment and addressing the skills misalignment in this country.

With these concerns in mind, Gatsby have therefore launched a programme of research to better understand what good careers guidance for adults looks like. This programme of research includes the development of a typology of adult careers guidance needs, followed by an analysis of the current landscape of adult career guidance in England and an international study to identify examples of best practice globally.

As the first stage in the programme, in Spring 2022 Gatsby commissioned Pye Tait Consulting to manage an evidence-gathering exercise, summarised below, to provide a clear understanding of the current ACG provision and infrastructure. It examines the strengths and weakness of ACG in England, who the key stakeholders are and what they provide, examples of best practice both in England and internationally, and the role of digital innovation in ACG.

Gatsby will next undertake an in-depth international research project into adult careers guidance, to better understand what 'good' looks like in different countries and to inform recommendations that will go into the wider programme of study.

Methodology

The evidence gathering engaged key organisations and individuals working in ACG and adult employment, ranging from those providing support for people out of work or needing generic careers advice, to those supporting career-changers or industry-specific advice. The types of organisations included were:

- awarding bodies;
- careers counselling, coaching and mentoring organisations and individuals;
- charitable foundations and research bodies;
- further education providers;
- higher education providers;
- industry and employers;
- membership organisations, institutes and professional bodies;
- private training providers;
- organisations and individuals providing careers advice and guidance;
- representatives of the public sector (e.g. Jobcentre Plus); and
- recruitment sector.

Key stakeholders from each of these groups were identified and just under 300 individuals and organisations were invited to participate. The online survey was promoted through targeted mailing, regular Careers Development Institute (CDI) newsletters, Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) newsletters and bulletins, on the Gatsby and Pye Tait websites, and on LinkedIn.

Between 17 May 2022 and 8 July 2022, 70 unique responses were received from people working in a range of roles (Table 1) from multiple organisations (Table 2). Most participants provided very detailed, high-quality feedback.

Table 1 Respondents' roles

Role	
Careers adviser	19
Director	9
Manager	7
C-Suite executive	7
Head of department	5
Teaching professional	3
Enterprise coordinator	2
Business development	2
Lead on policy/engagement	2
Assistant principal	1
Employment specialist	1
No role provided	12
Total	70

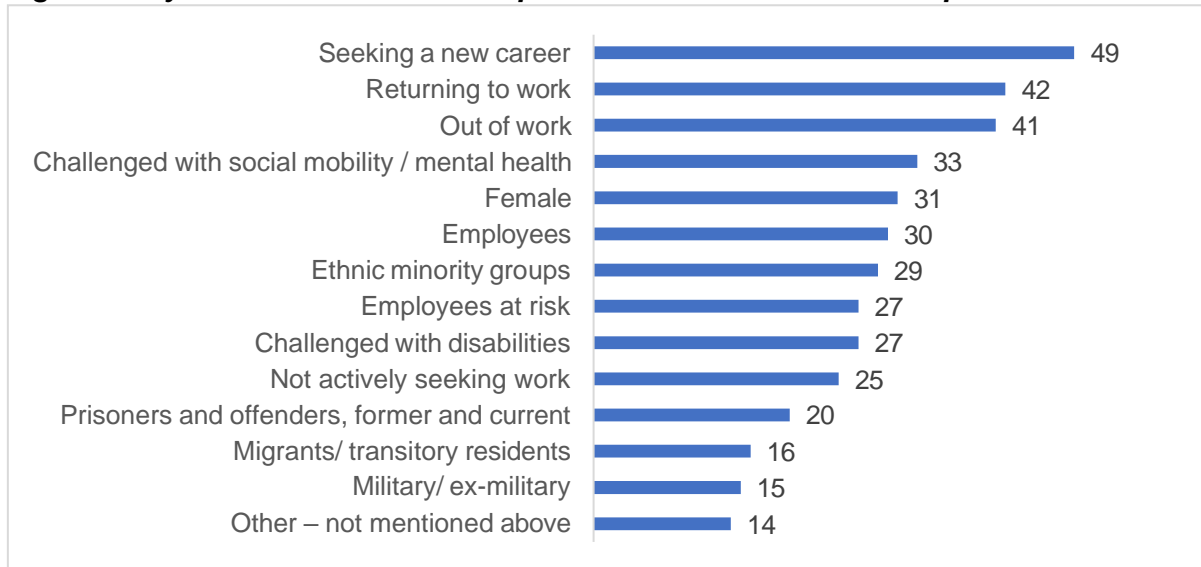
Note: some roles have been grouped together.

Table 2 Respondents’ organisation type

Organisation type	
Careers adviser/organisation providing CIAG	23
Higher education provider	10
Careers counsellor/coach/mentor	10
Membership organisation/institute/professional body	7
No organisation as am self-employed	3
Local enterprise partnership	3
Further education provider	2
Private training provider	2
Awarding body	2
Charitable foundation/research body	2
Public sector (e.g. DWP)	3
Industry	2
Recruitment agency/organisation	1

Respondents tended to be highly experienced in ACG, with two thirds (47) having anywhere from 10 to 20 years of experience in the sector. Most respondents worked with those seeking a new career, those returning to work, or those out of work (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Key ACG audiences that respondents work with or have expertise of



Base: 65 respondents, multiple responses permitted. Pye Tait/Gatsby evidence gathering, 2022

Current ACG landscape: weaknesses in ACG in England

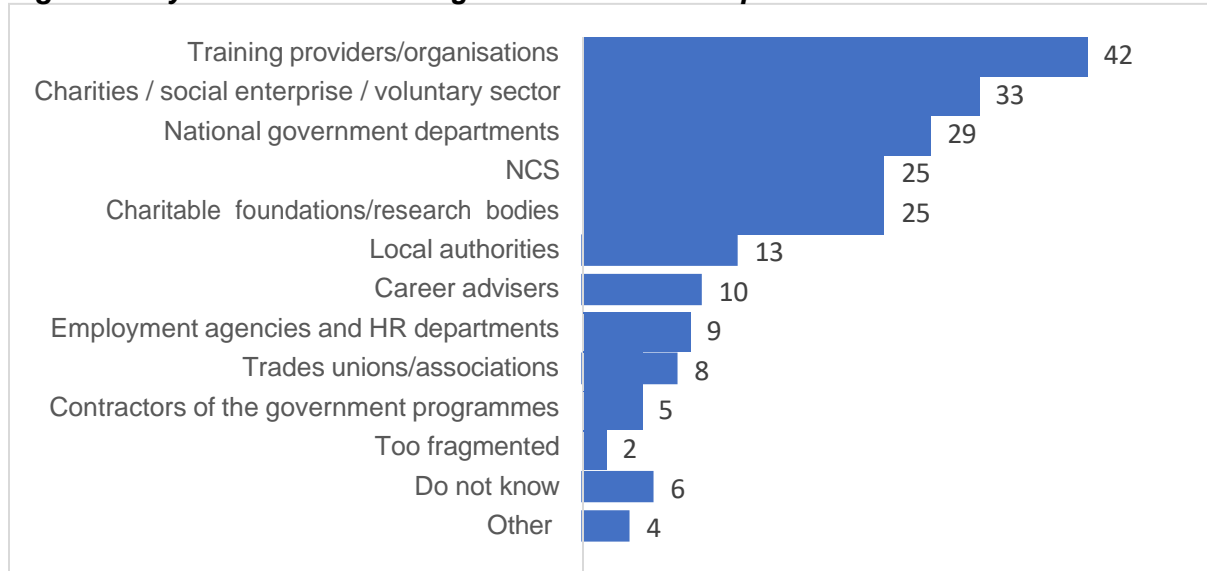
Compared to career services for young people in schools and colleges – which have improved since the adoption of the Gatsby benchmarks and the rollout of national infrastructure such as Careers Hubs – respondents reported that ACG provision is inconsistent and lacks cohesion.

There is currently no single source of ACG in England, and this makes the careers landscape confusing, fragmented and unclear to users. Instead, the ACG landscape has various stakeholders engaged in different elements of career guidance, and there is no common thread bringing their efforts together. However, the Department for Education’s Unit for Future Skills is working to provide a Single source of labour market information to learners to improve their choice of training courses and careers.

Key stakeholders in ACG

Participants in the evidence-gathering exercise identified the key stakeholders in ACG in England (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Key stakeholders in England’s ACG landscape



Base: 70 respondents, multiple responses permitted. Pye Tait/Gatsby evidence gathering, 2022

The National Careers Service is central to the ACG landscape and many of the study participants focused their responses on this work. The National Careers Service provides support to adults in need of advice and has an extensive network of contractors and subcontractors who, in cooperation with local authorities and organisations, deliver ACG programmes to fit local needs. However, participant feedback highlighted that the National Careers Service has priority groups that they focus on supporting, including adults with protected characteristics and those unemployed for more than 12 months, and they do not have the capacity to provide a high-quality service to all audiences.

Besides the National Careers Service, Figure 2 shows the number of other organisations playing a critical part in ACG in England in that they either provide ACG, are involved in research of ACG, or incorporate elements of ACG in their work. The Department for Education (DFE) and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) have elements of career guidance in their programmes, but the evidence suggests there is little coordination with, or signposting to,

the National Careers Service in these programmes. Representatives of industries and membership organisations pointed to the lack of communication channels with the wider sector.

Many adults are either unaware of the National Careers Service or believe they would not qualify for their support. This leads many to seek guidance from community or charitable providers, where the funding exists, or from private providers running services for employees or for paying clients. The result is inconsistent provision, not only in terms of availability, but also in quality, as there is no compulsory regulatory framework in place for private coaches and mentors other than through voluntary membership of professional bodies.

Targets

Another issue raised by respondents is the focus on targets in ACG provision. As a result, services risk only seeking quick and measurable outcomes such as paper-based evidence (preparing a CV, careers and skills action plans, evidence of job or course searches etc.) or employment. According to participants, this is the case for many organisations – including the National Careers Service, jobcentres and recruitment agencies – and this moves the focus from personal skills and training to employability and labour market demand.

Staff and funding limitations

Participants spoke of a lack of highly qualified staff in ACG – particularly in comparison to youth career services. While schools and colleges should ensure that careers advisers are trained to a minimum of Level 6, respondents suggested that a Level 4 qualification is often considered sufficient for adult provision.

Other issues highlighted in the study were a lack of career progression for ACG professionals, and insufficient salary. One participant felt the limitations of the existing National Careers Service funding model made it impossible to cover additional costs for National Careers Service contractors. These costs include funding for the continuing professional development (CPD) of frontline staff, supervision of professional service delivery, quality assurance, and investment in the technology required to make the service accessible to customers. The re-procurement of services, frequent changes in the customer relationship management (CRM) system, and reporting requirements appear to create additional costs and delays in getting local and national reporting systems aligned.

Reaching the adult audience

The adult audience is more complex and diverse than the youth audience, and it is therefore harder to engage with effectively. Young people are provided with information through schools or colleges, but without a single source of information accessible to the whole working-age population, many people are not aware of the support they could benefit from.

Current ACG landscape: strengths of ACG in England

Most responses about good practice in ACG in England mentioned that it is usually tailored to the needs of the individual seeking advice and very often provides practical advice. The interactive and accessible nature of online support were also highlighted. The coordination of efforts on ACG programmes between some organisations, e.g. charities, local councils and employers, was also a feature of successful careers guidance.

The work of the National Careers Service was seen as the key strength of England's ACG provision because it provides good quality support, it is continuously developing, and has an extensive network of contractors and subcontractors delivering ACG programmes that fit local needs. National Careers Service customers are reported as being generally happy with the quality of service they receive.

One in every five respondents gave an example of good practice by private career practitioners or organisations. This largely involved the ability of private organisations or practitioners to easily tailor their approach to the individual adult in question – particularly if that individual has unique needs to be met. Additionally, one stakeholder said that practitioners in this space do not have the pressures of funding provision which would mean them having to adjust what they can offer to meet the funding restrictions. However, it must be noted that only stakeholders who were themselves private career practitioners had comments on the quality of private provision.

Many education providers offer careers guidance, typically through one-to-one sessions and targeted group sessions for specific vocations, as well as supporting students with external issues like student finance. Three respondents stated that Higher Education institutions regularly held events for their older students, i.e. the ones ready to leave for employment, including opportunities for students to meet with national and international employers.

Eight respondents stated that employers supported careers in a variety of ways – by making apprenticeships available to give workers career pathways; and by working with local enterprises, councils and providers on skills needs and careers advice. The [Qdos Career Hub](#) in Rotherham, for example, was highlighted as good practice because they will serve the local community and are for all-ages. Equally, there are examples of good practice in local enterprise or authority-led programmes such as the [Plymouth Skills Launchpad](#) (which connects local people with opportunities for skills, training, education and jobs) or the [Humber Jobs Fuse](#) (helping those in the Humber area who lost jobs because of the Covid-19 pandemic get back into employment). Participants saw these programmes as important because they serve the local area first and are led by organisations or local authorities who know the problems and opportunities in the area.

What each example of good practice relies on is effective communication and promotion of the services to the wider adult population. Certain types of organisations are better placed to help certain types of adults needing careers guidance, such as Human Resources departments or employers working in the best interests of those already working for them. One participant highlighted free online ACG resources on YouTube, such as the [University of Warwick's channel](#), or on independent sites such as the [Career Catalyst](#). However, similar to the situation with the National Careers Service, free online videos were seen as an untapped resource because many adults do not know they exist.

Good practice in the devolved nations

Participants referenced careers services in the devolved nations of Scotland and Wales as having examples of good practice that England could adopt. [Careers Wales](#) and [Skills Development Scotland](#) provide careers information, advice and guidance (CIAG) for adults in any stage of life and any circumstance – this includes those in learning, returning to work, or those seeking to change or progress their career. Both Wales and Scotland also integrate their

national young people's career guidance with their ACG departments. Participants suggested that having an all-ages service is good because it enables a joined-up approach that does not split resources unevenly across the needs of the population. Northern Ireland recently undertook a comprehensive review of its all-age career services and made recommendations to improve the targeting, timeliness, effectiveness, and efficiency of the service. The review recommended that more could be done for adults already in work as well as those in education.

Another example of similar good practice is Ireland's National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE), which has oversight of career guidance across the life course. However, the NCGE not only has a joined-up approach, but it also hosts a national forum that brings together key stakeholders to ensure regular and purposeful communication. Ireland also uses a national framework that guides all qualifications and training provided within the guidance and counselling sector in the country.

Study participants across the board regarded the government-funded careers service websites for Wales and Scotland as much better than that for England. [Working Wales](#), [Careers Wales](#) and [Skills Development Scotland](#) were judged to be more comprehensive, more structured, more interactive and to have excellent signposting and advertising. Careers Wales have also adopted innovative digital outreach tools by using Minecraft in their digital outreach.

Working Wales has collaborated with Canadian, Scottish and other Welsh careers practitioners in a recent wellbeing pilot which was highlighted as good practice. Study participants shared a perception that advisers in ACG in the devolved nations are more highly qualified than in England and receive higher pay, which help the services retain professionals.

International good practice

Australia was referenced most frequently in relation to international good practice. Australia has a national portal that supports the delivery of careers guidance to the wider population and – as for Scotland, Wales and Ireland – the Australian portal is liked for its integrated nature and its holistic approach to guidance and counselling. The Australian portal handles careers guidance from early childhood to higher education and employment, offering support at any stage of someone's career.

Germany was praised for its non-commercial career guidance. The German system is another all-ages approach, but the German system splits guidance between educational and vocational guidance. The Federal Employment Agency is mandated by law to offer careers guidance to young people and adults, and general educational guidance is often handled by education providers.

Respondents mentioned a North American-wide organisation called the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) that connects college, university and recruitment career service professionals. Like for Australia, the USA's work in vocational psychology is again considered a positive feature.

Sweden's Job Security Councils were regarded as helpful, with Swedes who lose their jobs being automatically enrolled. The councils work with those made redundant to identify any weaknesses in their CV or training and helps them fill these gaps and get back to work.

According to the OECD, 90% of Swedes who are made redundant are working again within the year compared to 30% in France and Portugal.¹

Collectively, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland are seen as good examples. The pinnacle of the all-age approach was Finland's [National Lifelong Guidance Strategy 2020-2023](#) which focuses specifically on lifelong support to adults. A representative from a membership organisation responded that adopting a similar document in England could provide "focus and direction for all-age career guidance provision in England".

One participant said that both France and Singapore were examples of good practice. France was highlighted for its regional public guidance service – [Service public régional de l'orientation \(SPRO\)](#) – which operates according to the labour and market needs of each region. Singapore is highlighted for its integrated model of employment and skills support that includes guidance for adults.

Overall, all international examples of good practice stand out because of their comprehensive approach to supporting lifelong careers guidance and for their focus on an integrated service for education and careers support gathered in one place.

Role of digital innovation in ACG

The responses suggested that digital innovation could be a potential key strength of England's ACG, particularly around accessibility of career guidance through a variety of tools such as webinars, websites, support networks and forums, which increases the availability of support to individuals. Digital platforms are a convenient way to access information, and participants in the evidence gathering predicted a significant increase in the use of digital tools in career guidance in the future. However, not all adults have internet access to be able to use services online and some prefer the face-to-face experience to online engagement.

Suggestions for an improved ACG landscape in England

Suggestions for an improved approach to ACG in England that came for the evidence gathering were:

- Having an all-ages service that guides individuals at every stage of their career, throughout their life.
- An integrated service for education and careers support gathered in one place.
- Building a larger network of highly qualified careers professionals.
- Improved coordination, cooperation and communication between ACG stakeholders.
- Improving the interactive elements of online platforms.
- Better promotion and communication of available support to the adult audience.
- Having a named career practitioner to support an individual.
- Improved pay for ACG professionals.

¹ <https://www.oecd.org/els/emp/Backtowork-report.pdf>

Potential for future research

There was limited engagement by employers and recruitment agencies in this evidence gathering exercise. Given their importance in the landscape these audiences should be of special focus in future.

This evidence gathering also reveals potential for further engagement with charities and the voluntary sector. The Prince's Trust, Business in the Community (BITC) and the Citizen's Advice Service may be of particular interest for future research because they provide tailored support to adults with specific barriers to work. Many charities provide advice to adults who do not always qualify for support from the National Careers Service, and they often act as contractors or subcontractors for National Careers Service programmes. Such positioning places them at the heart of the ACG and makes them an invaluable source of information about how national programmes may be tailored to local needs.