

Executive Summary

Unlocking Potential: How Careers Guidance Can Fuel Economic Growth

11th December 2024

Key Recommendations:

- Roll out the government's pledge to guarantee work experience for young people in an equitable way. Better coordination and funding are needed to assist employers and schools.
- Funding a **dedicated, full-time career adviser** in every secondary school.
- Encourage **multi-modal provision**, complementing one-on-one advice with work experience and labour market information. One-on-one advice should also be of a suitable length with an adviser who has built a relationship with the person being advised.
- Ensure that the 1000 extra career practitioners the [Labour government has pledged to train](#) are assisted in finding employment, rather than just having their training funded.
- Embedding career guidance within the [Lifelong Learning Entitlement](#).
- Ensuring **continued professional development (CPD) for careers advisers**, training more with **specialist skills** such as experience working with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) students.
- Mayoral Combined Authorities to take on a greater role to better coordinate existing services and ease the burden on individual employers.
- **More consistent, long-term, and stable funding** to enable services to take a long-term approach to supporting people.

Event Summary:

On Wednesday 11th December 2024, Policy Connect and the Career Development Policy Group (CDPG) hosted a parliamentary roundtable event examining how career guidance can fuel economic growth in the UK. The event was chaired by the Rt Hon. Lord Jim Knight of Weymouth and attended by APPG for Skills, Careers and Employment members such as Baroness Sue Garden of Frognal. The event highlighted career guidance as a driver of economic and social change, with contributions showing the role of career guidance in supporting the skills system, social mobility, and decent work, facilitating a productive conversation with civil servants, senior government officials and a diverse range of stakeholders.

This document was produced as a post-event write up by Policy Connect. While it was informed by the discussion, it does not necessarily represent the view of all those in attendance, or of Policy Connect.

Key Themes and Topics:

- **Awareness of Career Guidance:** Needs to be encouraged and not assumed to exist, particularly amongst those who would benefit most.
- **Embedding Career Support into Broader Policy Goals:** The government's objectives provide an opportunity to move career guidance into mainstream policy debate.
- **The Role of Employers in Career Development:** Employer-supported interventions need to be more common, but employers must be incentivised properly.
- **Challenges in Career Guidance:** Improvements to the sector must start with properly valuing careers advisers.

Awareness of Career Guidance:

- There is a lack of awareness and understanding of the role of career development services. 62% of people could gain value from careers support, but only 15% of adults have accessed career services since completing education.¹
- A 'public health campaign around careers' is needed. The approach is often to create services and assume that people will make use of them, when people require active encouragement to engage with career guidance.
- Large knowledge gaps exist concerning how the education and job market works, disadvantaging those who would benefit most. It is wrongly assumed there is a 'common understanding' of how employment can be successfully navigated. A lack of knowledge leads to lower confidence and missed opportunities.
- Greater awareness of career guidance is vital, given the benefits it can bring to individuals who make use of it. These include an improved sense of career direction, greater ability to articulate strengths, and better navigation of career transitions.

Embedding Career Support into Broader Policy Goals:

- Career guidance aligns with the government's goals of growing the economy and improving living standards. A direct link can be made between career guidance and growth, providing an opportunity to move it into mainstream policy debate.
- Career guidance can play a role in addressing labour market challenges and ensuring people make informed decisions in a rapidly changing economy.
- The Learning and Work Institute's analysis of December 2024 data showed that 1,237,000 16–24-year-olds are not in employment or full-time education.² Career guidance has a role to play in tackling youth unemployment, and it is key that services are available in education settings.

¹ Career Development Institute. Valuing Careers: Full Report. <https://www.thecdi.net/getmedia/4c780661-59ba-4adb-8918-ce99dddb1cb8/VC-Full-Report-v6.pdf>.

² Learning and Work Institute, "Labour Market Analysis: December 2024," accessed January 27, 2025, <https://learningandwork.org.uk/what-we-do/employment-and-social-security/labour-market-analysis/december-2024/>.

- However, over-concentration of career guidance in the education system must be avoided. Many career decisions are made in work or close to work, and the shift to a predominantly school-based system has meant guidance is often not available at these crucial moments.
- Increasing the accessibility of career guidance for those in employment would mean the economy would benefit from better use of existing skills and competencies.

The Role of Employers in Career Development

- Employer-supported career development interventions are less common than they should be for three reasons: fragmentation of the skills system; a general decline in the culture of investment; and a lack of clear career pathways.
- Employer engagement with career development needs to be increased, especially given the benefits to them as well as to employees. Career guidance can help broaden horizons and dispel common myths about a sector, increasing engagement by improving understanding of the range of jobs available.
- Caution was advised in demanding more of employers without incentivising them properly. Criticising employers could be counterproductive if it makes them want to invest less. Many employers are investing in the career development of their employees, and more focus is needed on finding examples of best practice and sharing them.
- The embedding of career guidance within the government's industrial strategy and post-16 skills strategy presents an opportunity to create a more positive and coherent narrative around what career guidance is aiming to achieve.

Challenges in Career Guidance:

- The sector has historically been undervalued, and improving the system requires properly valuing careers advisers. Key workforce challenges include low pay relative to qualifications, budget cuts, and fragmented and unstable employment across schools and colleges, local authorities, private companies, and charities.
- A whole workforce approach is required when recruiting in the sector. Additional careers advisers must go to the sectors where they are needed most, especially given the gap in services for those in employment.
- Career guidance must not be conflated with employability services. Employability and career guidance services are complementary but different, and a specialist career guidance service must be maintained as policy changes are implemented.
- Policy change must be accompanied by culture change. For example, the new National Jobs and Careers Service must pivot toward helping people into meaningful careers rather than getting people into work and off benefits as quickly as possible.

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Policy Connect is a cross-party think tank. We specialise in supporting parliamentary groups, forums, and commissions, delivering impactful policy research and event programmes, and bringing together parliamentarians and government in collaboration with academia, business, and civil society to help shape public policy in Westminster and Whitehall, to improve people's lives.

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