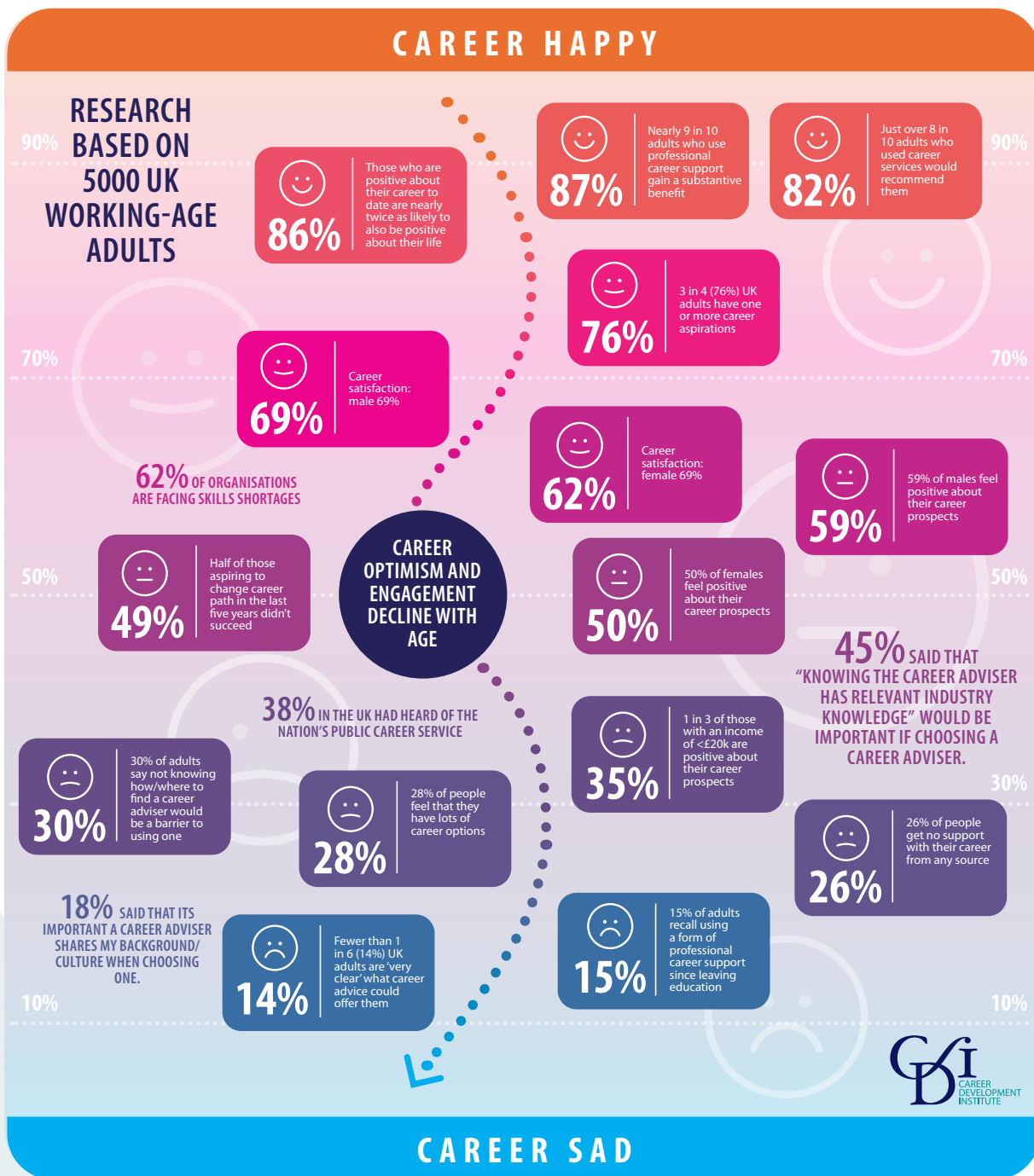




# VALUING CAREERS

Executive Summary Report





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## Foreword

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

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

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

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

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

### Our research

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

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

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

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

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

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



**David Morgan**  
Chief Executive, Career Development Institute

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## About our study

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

1. A wide body of international research has evaluated careers guidance interventions and services over decades, and systematically shows that it offers value to individuals and society.
2. We observe many challenges in the UK that careers guidance can help address, including skills shortages in key sectors, technological change, economic difficulties, high levels of economic inactivity, well-being challenges such as burnout, and poor social mobility that exacerbates inequalities. However, only a small fraction of those affected by these issues seek professional careers support.
3. Despite the benefits and value of careers guidance, the sector is itself struggling with recruitment and retention challenges due to an ageing workforce, low pay in some areas, and a lack of recognition of the value that professionals bring.
4. The scale and nature of the opportunity for careers guidance to provide support to working-age people is not well understood.

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

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

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

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

In this document, we have summarised the key findings and recommendations. A longer report is available on the CDI website.

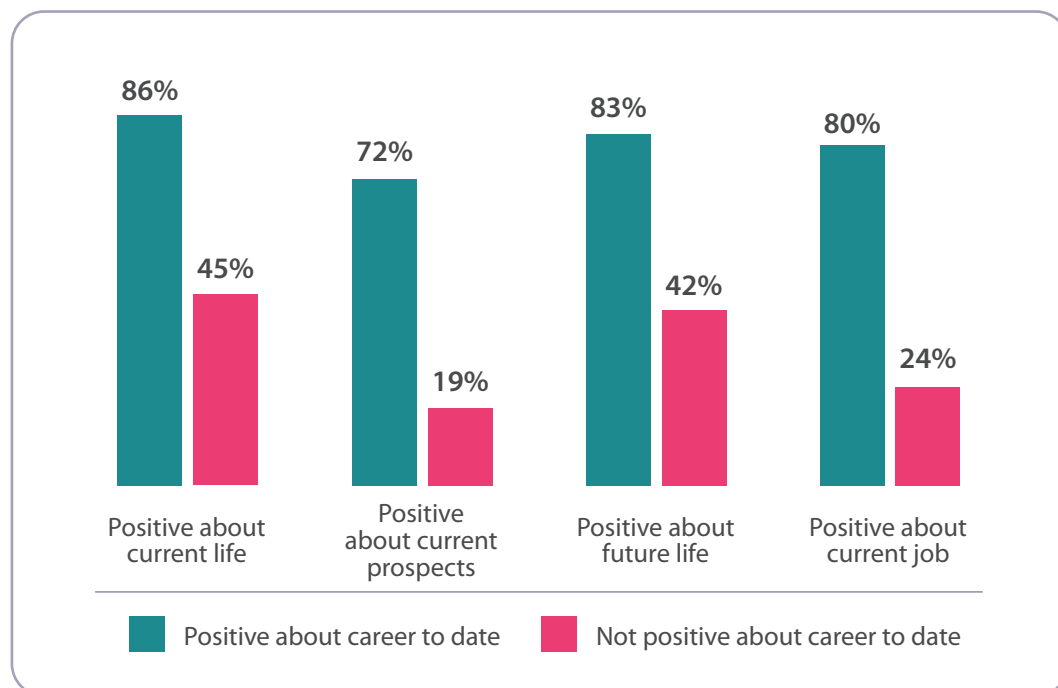
## Key findings

### Careers are vital to our wider lives and sense of wellbeing

We found evidence for how important careers are to the rest of life: People who feel positive about their careers are about twice as likely to feel positive about their wider lives (86% vs 45%).

However, people feel better about their past careers than their future prospects: only 54% feel optimistic about their future career. Those who feel better about their careers to date also feel more optimistic about the future.

**Fig 1: The importance of careers to our lives: Differences in wider satisfaction indicators of those that feel positive or not about their career to date.**



### The great majority have career aspiration, but anticipate barriers

When we asked people what they had aspired to do over the past five years and the next five, we found that 76% of people had at least one of a series of common career aspirations (shown in Fig 2).

Looking at the differences between career aspirations and success rates over the past five years showed that the population demonstrate a variable ability to achieve different career aspirations. While 87% who aspired to build their knowledge or skills over the past five years managed to do so, fewer than half of those who aspired to career change path were successful.

We recognise that helping individuals achieve many of these aspirations has benefits that extend beyond the individual level. For instance, supporting more people to acquire skills and successfully transition between career paths can address the needs of the labour market and contribute to the overall health of the economy. (Notably, only about 12% of the population successfully changed their career paths in the last five years, despite the rapidly changing demands of the labour market.)

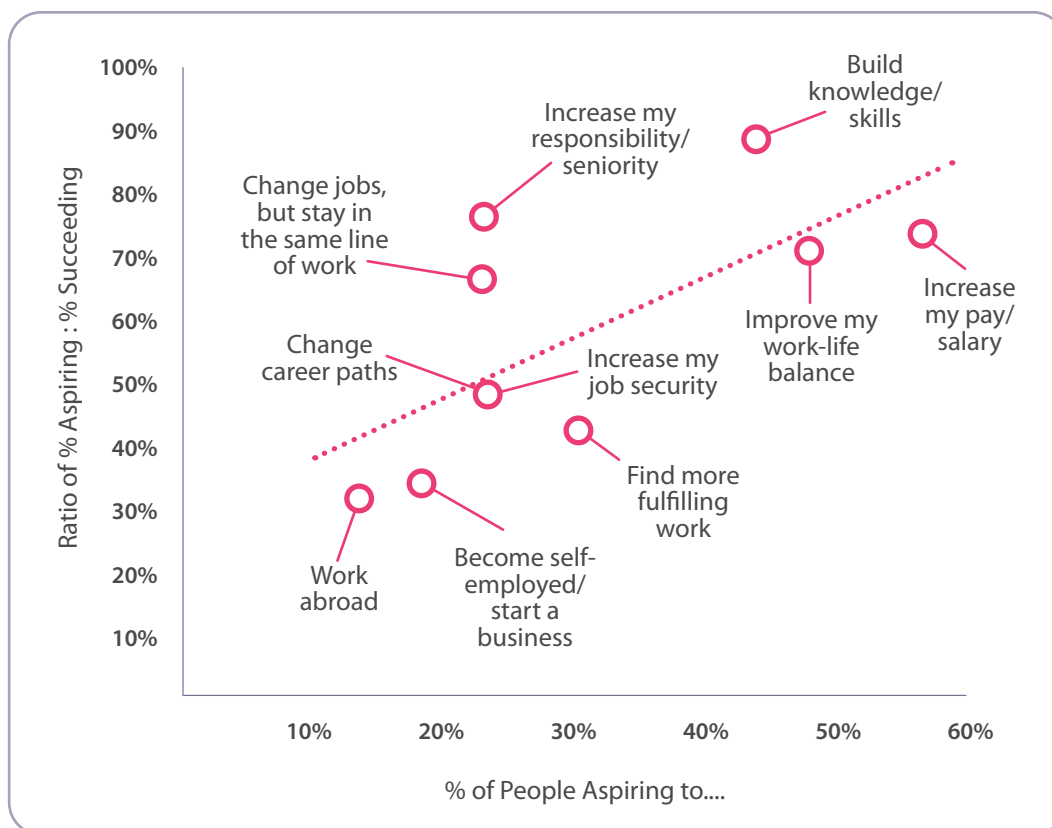


76%

When we asked people what they had aspired to do over the past five years and the next five, we found that 76% of people had at least one of a series of common career aspirations

Fig 2: Our career aspirations and our abilities to achieve them:

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



When we asked individuals to identify barriers that might prevent them from achieving their career goals in the next five years, 80% mentioned at least one obstacle. While there was no single dominant barrier, the most common concern was a lack of self-confidence, which was cited by 28% of respondents.

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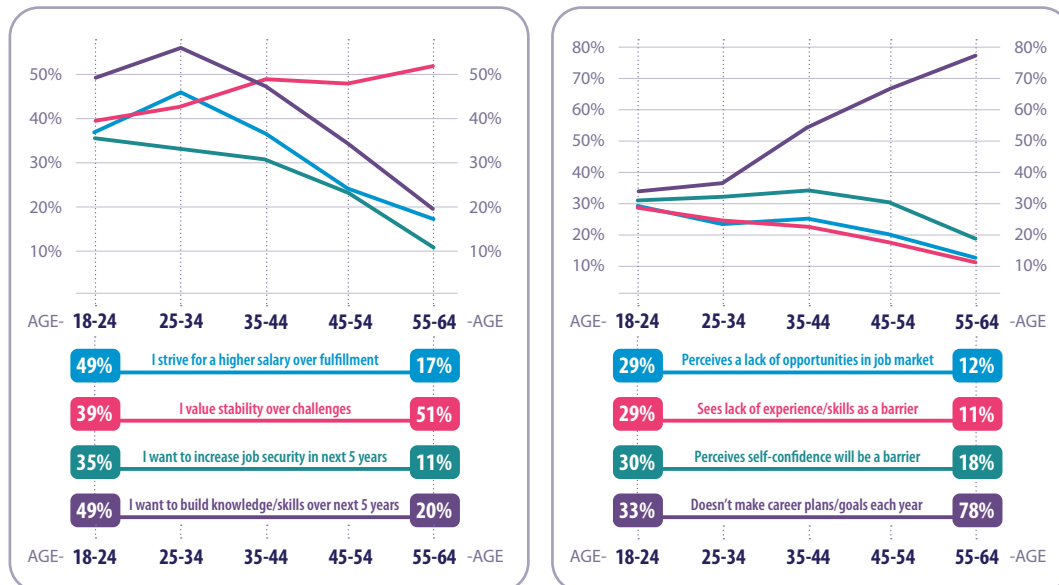


## We see compelling evidence for career support over the entire career span

Attitudes, experiences and challenges evolve over the career span. Notably, as people get older, career satisfaction and confidence to achieve career aspirations declines from decades before typical retirement age. While 71% of 18–24-year-olds are positive about their career prospects, only 42% of 45–54-year-olds feel the same.

As people get older, they also appear to reduce engagement in various career management activities and decisions. This is shown most starkly by the disengagement from setting career goals and plans.

**Fig 3. Evolution of career motivations (left) and potential barriers to advancing towards career goals (right) over age ranges**



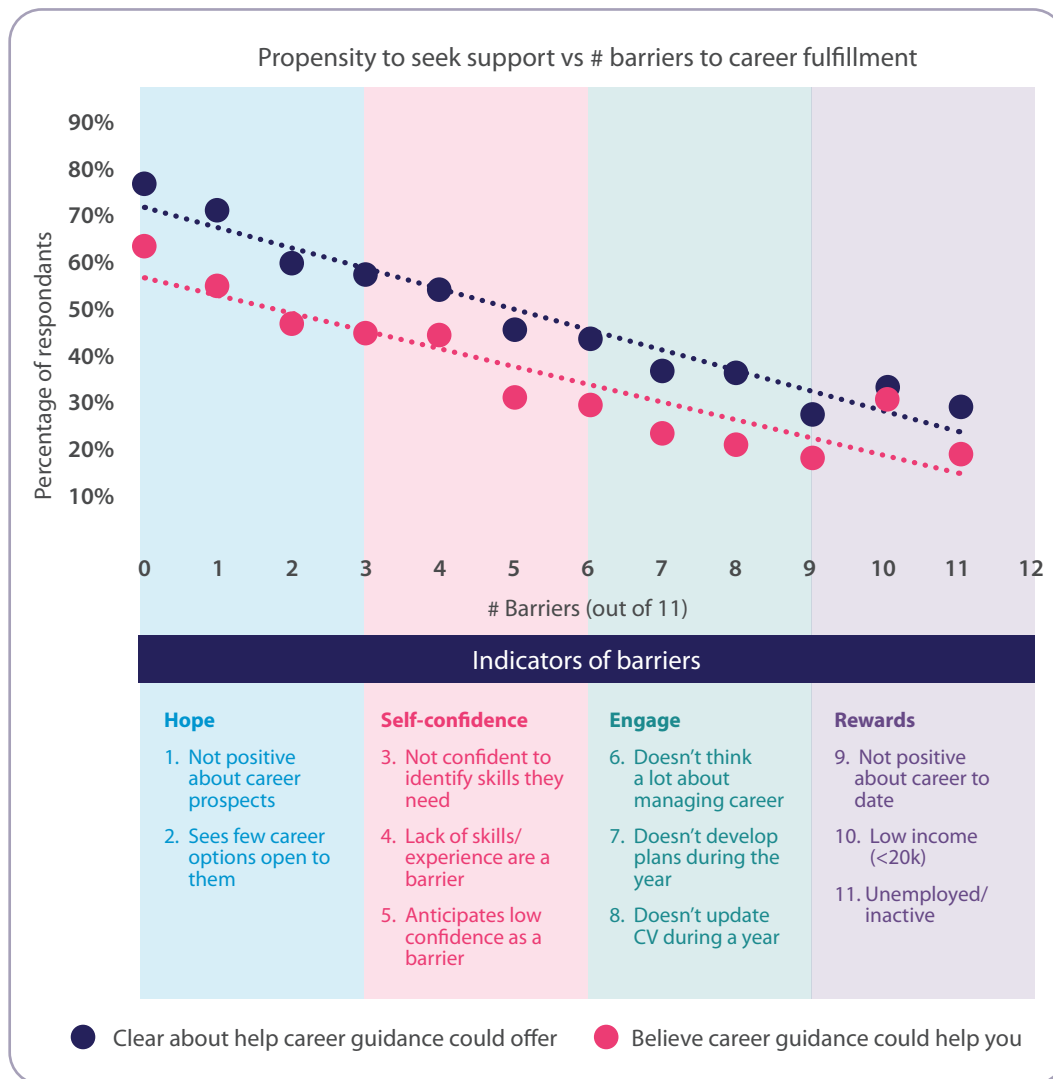
## We see cases to overcome systemic barriers to good careers

Our analysis shows a significant fraction (20%-30%) of the population face mutually reinforcing factors that hinder the attainment of a fulfilling career. In Figure 4, we show a cluster of eleven mutually reinforcing indicators that serve to hinder the attainment of a fulfilling career. These are clustered into four categories: hope, self-confidence, engagement and outcomes from a career. We found 29% of people have indicators of concern in all four of these categories.

Fig 4 indicates that the more people have barriers to a fulfilling career, the less that they show a propensity to seek professional career support, indicated by being a) less clear about what career guidance could offer them and b) less likely to believe that career guidance could help them. This means that we have additional challenges to encourage engagement with career services, beyond simply providing information on the availability of support.

We found significant disparities in career optimism between individuals with higher education or apprenticeship qualifications and those whose highest qualification was from secondary education. While the former group exhibited a net positive outlook on their career prospects, the latter tended to feel more negatively. This stark contrast strongly suggests that more targeted interventions could and should be implemented to address the needs of those at risk of encountering systemic obstacles to fulfilling careers, thereby preventing the exacerbation of existing inequalities.

Fig 4: Evaluating the number with systemic barriers to a fulfilling career.



**Very few adults proactively get professional support**

62% of UK working-age adults recall receiving careers support from a careers or education professional while in education, but only 15% recall support from a career professional since leaving education, via a public career service, private coach/ counsellor or through their work.

This means that, although 46% of people do not feel optimistic about their career prospects, 76% have aspirations and 80% anticipate barriers, only a few percent of people every year seek out professional support via a public career service, a private coach/ counsellor or a career coach/ counsellor at work.

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 We found significant disparities in career optimism between individuals with higher education or apprenticeship qualifications and those whose highest qualification was from secondary education.  
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### Those that do get support gain multiple benefits

Those that do receive support as an adult reported very strong positive results: 86% reported a substantive benefit from professional adult career guidance (e.g. help to understand career options or submit better applications), and 82% would recommend it to others. Fig 5 shows the range of benefits received by users of the services.

Fig 5. Main benefits gained from different forms of career support beyond secondary and tertiary education



- Those who received career support are also significantly more optimistic about their future career than those that didn't. Those who received career support over the past five years have been better able to achieve their aspirations over this timeframe.



76%

When we asked people what they had aspired to do over the past five years and the next five, we found that 76% of people had at least one of a series of common career aspirations

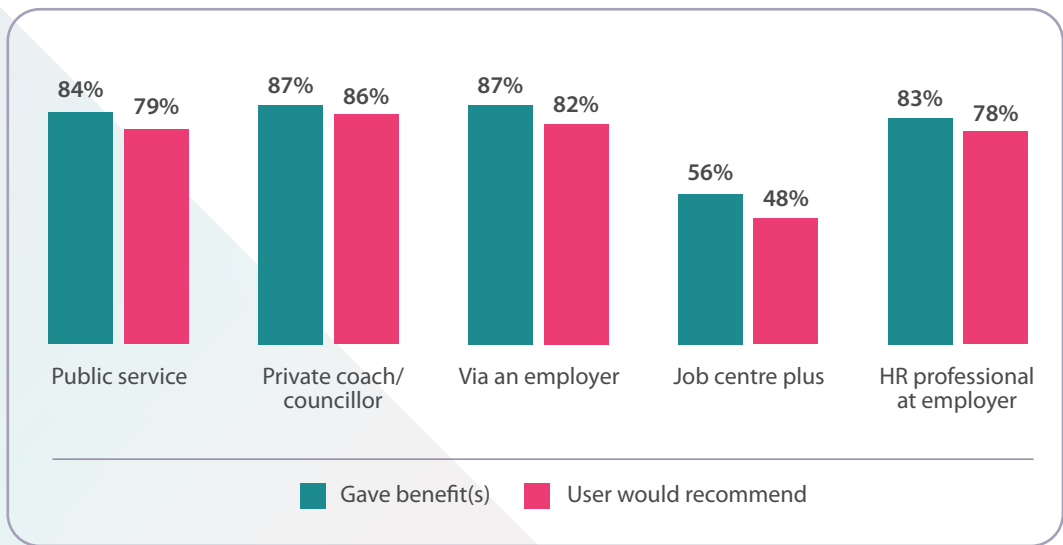


Comparing the outcomes from users of public career services, private coaches/counsellors and career coaches at work is not “like for like”, due to the different client contexts and different resources available to the client. Nonetheless, all of these provide strong positive outcomes for their users (Fig 6).

We also see different results attained by users of Jobcentre Plus. This serves to emphasise that career services and Jobcentre Plus play different roles. Verbatim comments in the survey from respondents who had provided lower scores of job centres lamented the lack of wider career support, re-emphasising the differentiated value of professional career support.

“  
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Fig 6. Number of clients who cited benefit(s) from using adult career support and who would recommend it to others



## There are obstacles and opportunities to unlock the value of guidance

Our data showed the potential and case for careers guidance to support many more people than today. 62% of people could name a challenge where they would benefit from careers guidance today. Additionally, many people named career challenges and barriers throughout the survey, but indicated that they were less than clear about what career guidance could offer them. This suggests that people are not automatically associating their challenges and barriers with the value that career support could offer.

We found barriers to overcome to provide career guidance to more people. The most significant and fundamental is the lack of clarity and awareness of career guidance. Only 14% of people were “very clear” on what career guidance could offer them. 30% of people said that a barrier to using a career adviser was that they would not know where to find one. Across the UK, only 38% of people had heard of the public career service in their nation.

While 12% of people appeared to “reject” the proposition of career guidance as being relevant to them (through several responses to different questions), the majority see some value but have different and generally patchy levels of understanding.

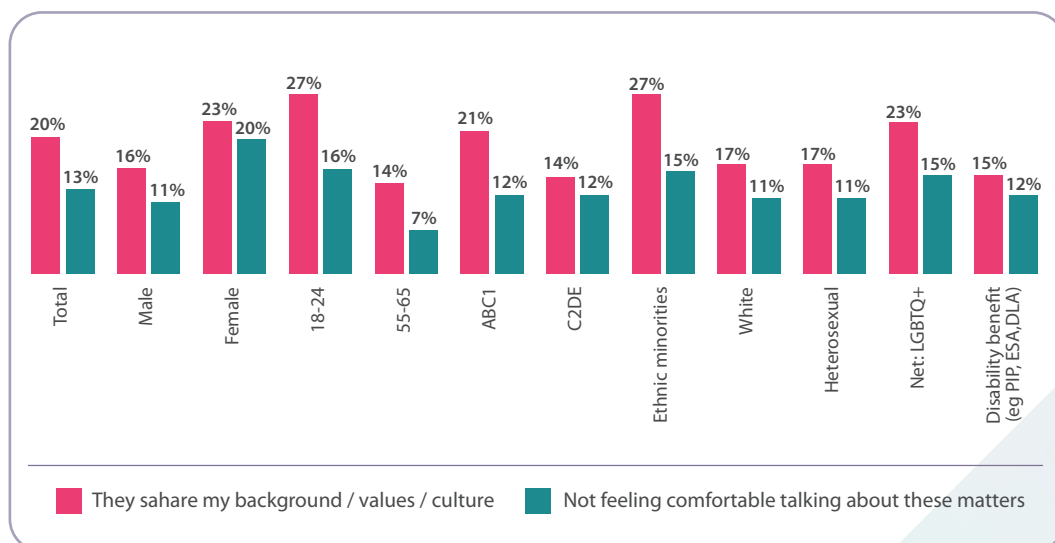


**62%** | 62% of people could name a challenge where they would benefit from careers guidance today.

Another key barrier is that 45% of people believed a career adviser’s lack of sector-specific expertise would hinder their ability to provide meaningful guidance.

For some groups, there were additional barriers. 27% of ethnic minorities said that it was important that they spoke to someone who shared their background, while 20% of females said that they felt a barrier to accessing support would be that they felt uncomfortable talking about career issues. Fig 7 illustrates these indicators

Fig 7: Indicators of feelings of inclusion and safety as cited potential barriers to using careers advisers across different illustrative groups



There is a clear case for more targeted interventions for people facing multiple, interrelated barriers to fulfilling work. This is particularly crucial given the notably low perceived relevance of current careers guidance among this group. To fully realise the potential benefits, it is essential to foster greater acceptance of professional support services. This goes beyond merely raising awareness; it requires cultivating a deeper understanding of the tangible advantages such guidance can offer.



## Recommendations

Our findings highlight key challenges and opportunities that we recommend policymakers, career development professionals, and researchers focus on.

### 1. Build greater momentum in education, providing career skills for life

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

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

While 76% can cite a career aspiration and 80% anticipate barriers to achieving goals in the next five years, only 12% strongly agree that careers guidance is for “people like me”. This is despite the strong recommendations given by users of such services.

### 3. Design targeted interventions for those with multiple barriers

From our data, we estimate up to 30% of the working population are trapped in unfulfilling work with the combined characteristics of low optimism, low levels of career management activity, and poorer outcomes from their work. Targeted interventions are needed as these people demonstrate lower trust that careers support can help them.

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

We see the opportunity to revitalise many careers where optimism and engagement have declined through middle-age, to contribute to longer careers and economic activity. Value would be created for both individuals and the wider economy.

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”





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

People access the same nominal benefits from different career support sources each with its own pros and cons. It's essential to clarify the options available to the public to get support, from those who are properly qualified, to address their challenges, as well as accessing accurate information.

## 6. Understand more about inclusive careers guidance

Indicators suggest having careers support from someone with a shared background is important to a significant and growing minority, particularly 27% of ethnic minorities. Females are also twice as likely to feel uncomfortable talking to a careers professional than males.

## 7. Address the demand for careers support with sector insight

45% said that it was important that a career adviser has specific industry knowledge. There is an ongoing need to educate the public on the role of career development professionals in adding enormous value by providing support, frameworks and processes, regardless of industry knowledge. There is also more that could be done to support practitioners in developing more specific industry knowledge, while making their sector expertise visible to members of the public, for example, through the UK Register of Career Development Professionals.

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

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

## Acknowledgements

The CDI would like to thank the following people for their contributions and encouragement in the creation of this report. Please note that their involvement does not necessarily imply agreement with all insights and recommendations presented herein.

- **Beth Jones**, Gatsby
- **Carolyn Parry**, Career Alchemy / CDI Wales Cymru
- **Catherine Sermon**, Phoenix Insights
- **Clare Viney**, CRAC
- **Julia Yates**, City University
- **Mark Bowman**, Inspira
- **Nina Chorzelewski**, Association of Colleges
- **Rebecca Passingham**, UNISON
- **Tom Shirt**, Gatsby



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