

# The vital role of career guidance in boosting opportunities for all

Commentary on recent policy development

## Executive Summary

- The provision of career guidance in schools is critical to the life chances of young people.
- Over the last fifteen years career guidance services have been radically defunded in ways that have left the system in desperate need of attention.
- These measures are vital in boosting opportunities for ordinary people across the country and delivering economic growth.
- Recent policy proposals from the Labour Party promised the injection of £85 million of new funding with key proposals focused on the delivery of 1000 new careers advisers and a new and more robust approach to work experience.
- At the point of publication, none of these proposals have been funded and the Career Development Policy Group has been informed that the 1000 new careers advisers policy will not be taken forward at the present time.
- The government should reaffirm its support for these proposals and develop a new approach for career guidance in schools and across the life course that can support policy aims for economic growth and the reinvigoration of lifelong learning.

## Introduction

Career guidance helps people to manage their life, learning and work. There is extensive evidence which demonstrates that career guidance is key to the development of individuals' capacities and provides a key link between the education and employment system.<sup>i</sup> Where career guidance operates well, it supports the effective functioning of labour markets and contributes to skills alignment and productivity, bringing economic and social benefits.

Recent work from the OECD highlights particular concerns about skills alignment in England, noting that '*three times more students expect to work as a professional than there are actual jobs available*'.<sup>ii</sup> Career guidance can help to address these kinds of mismatches between supply and demand in the labour market and improve productivity as well as contributing to increased social mobility.<sup>iii</sup>

The benefits brought about by career guidance improve the alignment between education and employment.<sup>iv</sup> This has been shown to lead to smoother transitions and better utilisation of human capital.<sup>v</sup> The impacts of these benefits have been evidenced both for individuals and for government, with the evidence suggesting that there is a positive fiscal return on investment for public spending in career guidance.<sup>vi</sup>

There is a strong consensus amongst policymakers, practitioners and experts that career guidance should begin no later than the start of secondary education, ideally during primary education, and continue throughout the education system.<sup>vii</sup>

This policy brief summarises recent career guidance policy in schools and colleges and reflects on the need to improve provision as a part of this governments wider policies on growth and opportunity.

## Recent policy

Between 2011 and 2014 career guidance services for young people in England were deregulated and defunded.<sup>viii</sup> From 2014 the formation of The Careers & Enterprise company began the process of renewing government funding in the area with a focus on careers education.<sup>ix</sup> Furthermore, the development of the Gatsby Benchmarks also provided a new and evidence-based framework for provision in schools and colleges, which ensured that existing resources were used effectively.<sup>x</sup>

Nonetheless a paper published by The Career Development Policy Group in 2023 estimated that funding for career support for young people had halved during the Conservative government.<sup>xi</sup> Furthermore, additional resourcing since 2014 has largely come from existing school and college budgets rather than coming from central and local government as in previous eras. Another impact of the lack of new funding has been a steady shrinking of the stock of professional capacity, ie qualified careers advisers, as the profession has aged and been insufficiently renewed.<sup>xii</sup> Recent research from the Career Development Institute suggests that 29% of current careers professionals are planning to leave the sector either because of imminent retirement or dissatisfaction with pay and conditions.<sup>xiii</sup> Collectively, these trends mean that career guidance is both more poorly funded and more precarious and fragmented than ever before.

While the level of resourcing has dramatically reduced, it is fair to acknowledge that there have been important innovations in policy, practice and evidence that have enabled the system to recover from its nadir in 2014. But by 2024, there was general recognition that further improvement would require new investment.

## Recent Labour policy commitments

The Labour manifesto was published in 2024 and echoed criticisms of the existing career development system.<sup>xiv</sup> It promised to ‘*guarantee two weeks’ worth of work experience for every young person, and improve careers advice in schools and colleges*’ (p44). On 4<sup>th</sup> June 2024, the Labour Party also promised to ‘*prevent young people from falling out of education, employment and training before 18, by delivering 1,000 new careers advisers in schools, alongside good quality work experience, and providing specialist mental health support in every school.*’<sup>xv</sup>

A fiscal plan was also included as an appendix in the manifesto. This included £85 million for ‘*Delivering work experience and careers advice for all young people*’. While it is questionable as to whether this figure is sufficient to meet all the aims of the government in relation to career guidance for young people, it did represent a substantial commitment and a recognition that new funding was needed.

## Developments since the election

There has been a considerable amount of activity on career guidance in schools during the Government’s first year in power. *The statutory guidance for career guidance and access for education and training providers* has been updated in ways which increase the ambition for schools and colleges to provide high quality career guidance in line with both the revised Gatsby Benchmarks and the government’s specific ambitions around work experience.

The increased focus on career guidance and work experience is welcome, but it does place an additional burden on schools, employers and other stakeholders. In recent months the Department for Education have communicated that the 1000 new careers advisers commitment will not be taken forwards. At present there is no commitment to either any new legislation in this area or to provide the £85 million referenced in the manifesto.

This leaves schools and colleges under-resourced and a lack of adequate support for young people as they make educational and career choices in an increasingly volatile environment.

## The Career Guidance Guarantee

It has never been more important to have a robust career guidance system. The Government’s industrial strategy and ambition for growth relies on citizens having access to training and a good understanding of where the opportunities are in the labour market. Adequately funding career guidance is essential to the realisation of these ambitions.

The Career Development Policy Group argue that the Government needs to revisit these decisions and publish a new strategy setting out how an all-age career guidance guarantee can be delivered.<sup>xvi</sup> Within schools this needs to include ensuring that careers leaders are trained and resourced, that careers hubs are able to support schools and colleges adequately, that work experience is guaranteed (and appropriately resourced to ensure that it happens), that qualified careers professionals are available to all young people, that teachers are trained to provide career support and that destinations data is improved.

This will require new funding and serious thinking from the government. The manifesto offered a good start on this and it is important that these commitments are not abandoned.



## Endnotes

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- <sup>iv</sup> Percy, C., & Kashefpakdel, E. (2021). Linking educators and employers: taxonomies, rationales, and barriers. In P.J. Robertson, T. Hooley, & P. McCash (Eds.). *The Oxford handbook of career development* (pp. 65-78). Oxford University Press.
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- <sup>vi</sup> Percy, C. & Hooley, T. (2024). Lessons for career guidance from return-on-investment analyses in complex education-related fields, *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 52(3), 503-521. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2023.2186372>
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- <sup>ix</sup> Long, R., Lewis, J., & McDonough, C. (2024). *Careers guidance in schools, colleges and universities (England)*. House of Commons Library. <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7236/CBP-7236.pdf>
- <sup>x</sup> Gatsby Charitable Foundation. (2014). *Good career guidance*. Gatsby Charitable Foundation.
- <sup>xi</sup> Hooley, T., Percy, C., & Neary, S. (2023). *Investing in careers: What is career guidance worth?* iCeGS, University of Derby. <https://doi.org/10.48773/9zx1v>
- <sup>xii</sup> Gordon, K. (2022). *Workforce recruitment and retention in the careers sector*. <https://www.careersengland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Careers-England-Careers-Sector-Workforce-Recruitment-and-Retention-Report.pdf>
- <sup>xiii</sup> Career Development Institute (CDI). (2025). *Big listen results: Jan 25*. CDI.
- <sup>xiv</sup> The Labour Party. (2024). *Change*. The Labour Party. <https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Labour-Party-manifesto-2024.pdf>
- <sup>xv</sup> The Labour Party. (2024). *Labour's plan to get Britain working: How we'll boost employment, deliver better training and secure higher wages*. <https://labour.org.uk/updates/stories/labours-plan-to-get-britain-working/>
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