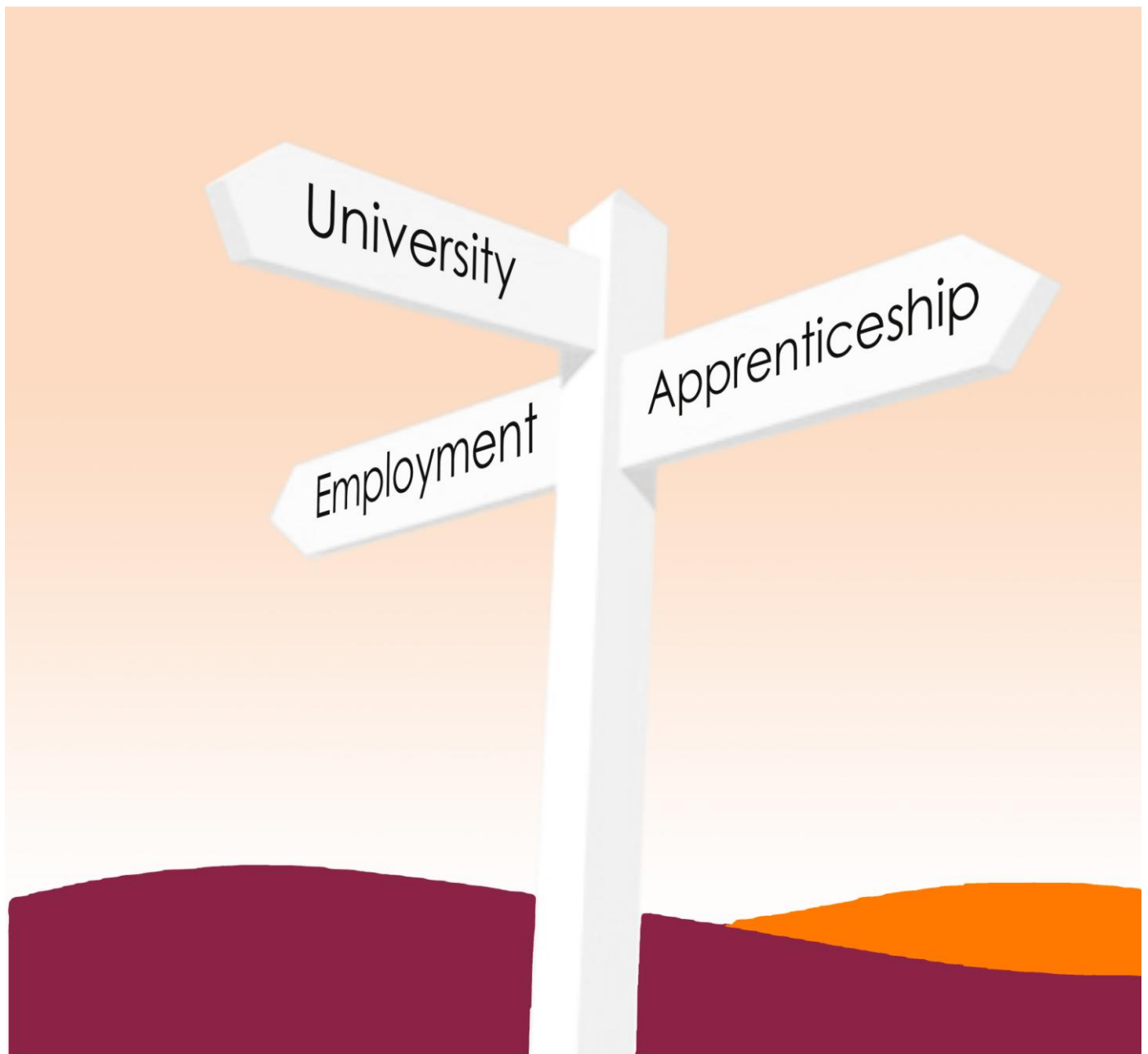# Complex needs, complex choices

The role of Career Learning, Information Advice and Guidance in the Further Education and Skills sector

Acknowledgements

Foreword

LSIS believes that effective and timely support for career development is critical for learners to enable them to plan, manage and develop their careers and maximise their potential. It is also vital to ensure that learners are supported to choose the right learning programme for them, to deal with issues while learning, and to look at progression opportunities after their programme, whether into work or further education.

The research was undertaken at a time of transition with the Connexions Service in many areas closing and the introduction of the National Careers Service and new arrangements for schools about to come into existence. We hope to be able to repeat the survey in a couple of years to see how these developments have impacted on learners' views and experiences.

With thanks to all those involved in the research, this report provides us with valuable information on learners' experiences and the support they want. It will be used to inform the work we do with providers in the FE and Skills sector on career development.

Rob Wye, Chief Executive, LSIS

Further education (FE) is often dismissed as an ill-defined and overly complex sector. However, its intrinsic value and the vital role it plays in society are poorly understood. Far from being a second-rate option, FE provides important second chances and for millions of people. It is a sector where all learners are treated as adults and given the opportunity to build their learning experience with their teachers. Understanding learners' journeys into and through FE is crucial to its sustainability.

The National Union of Students (NUS) believes that information, advice and guidance (IAG) provision should be shaped in collaboration with learners themselves. Asking learners about their future employment aspirations is only one element of a well-rounded service. Whilst it is crucial to match learners' desires to accurate labour market information, an understanding of their desires, aspirations and motivations full stop is the lynchpin of high quality IAG provision.

How can learners begin to shape their own destiny without a guarantee of impartial careers advice? Schools' obligation to provide an 'independent' source of advice will not ensure that young people are apprised of the full range of options available. Comprehensive and unbiased information about the choices on offer will be more important than ever as the compulsory participation age rises to 18.

This research demonstrates that those with complex needs require more intensive support, and moreover that a significant majority of learners in FE prefer face-to-face support with their learning and careers choices. Whilst many people are confident internet users, an over-reliance on web-based services poses a real barrier to those without digital literacy. Ultimately this threatens access to the right education and training opportunities, and the important role played by FE in enabling social mobility.

Toni Pearce, Vice President (Further Education), NUS

Contents

Executive summary

This report presents the findings of research undertaken by CFE on behalf of the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) and National Union of Students (NUS) to develop a more sophisticated understanding of Career Learning, Information, Advice and Guidance (CLIAG) for learners engaged within the Further Education (FE) and Skills sector.

Until recently, this was a relatively under-researched area. This report adds substantially to the evidence base on the complexity of the support needs of learners in the sector and the issues and challenges of delivering CLIAG to this group. It also offers valuable insights into the areas that require further exploration.

During the course of the research 18 stakeholders and over 1200 learners were consulted. The project was conducted against a backdrop of radical reforms to career guidance in England which will culminate in the launch of a new National Careers Service (NCS) in April 2012. The findings are, therefore, extremely timely, and provide a baseline for future comparisons.

Key findings

- Good quality and timely pre-entry CLIAG fulfils an important role in supporting learners to address diverse and complex needs and helps overcome barriers to access to the FE and Skills system. However, current provision has been shown to be variable, particularly for learners on vocational routes and those studying part-time.

- The majority of learners do access some form of pre-entry CLIAG. Young people are most likely to access professional services and regard them as useful. Although informal sources of IAG have a significant influence over learners of all ages, adults are more likely to draw on these sources only or to make decisions without seeking any form of IAG.

- A substantial minority of learners do not access professional pre-entry IAG. Non-use primarily results from a lack of perceived need rather than a lack of awareness or dissatisfaction with provision.

- Demand for IAG from learners while on programme declines substantially. Previous use appears to increase the likelihood that a learner will access IAG during their course, although further investigation is required to establish a conclusive link.

- The majority of learners who access IAG while on programme require support with future progression; only a small proportion seeks help to change course.

- A significant minority of learners intend to access IAG on exit from the FE and Skills system but a much smaller proportion acts on their intentions. The reasons for this require further investigation but the

continued role and influence of informal support, including from tutors and assessors, could offer a partial explanation.

- Younger learners express a preference for face-to-face delivery. Many mature learners and those who combine work and study in particular, are less likely to seek face-to-face services, preferring instead to access IAG remotely, either by telephone, email, or the internet.

- On average, learners express a high degree of confidence in their career management skills. Those with direct experience of the labour market have the strongest sense of the skills that they feel they have acquired. Professional IAG is recognised for the role it fulfils in helping learners to develop these skills.

Conclusions

It is impossible to define a 'typical learner' in the FE and Skills system. As a result, it is equally challenging to identify and address their varied and complex needs. A range of factors can impact on the decision-making process and the extent and nature of the support learners require varies according to the stage in their journey.

Very few learners rely on one source of help and support, preferring instead to draw on a range of sources, both formal and informal. Learners' perceptions of the role and importance of formal CLIAG, as well as their patterns of use, can, therefore, only be understood fully when considered in relation to the informal support mechanisms they also utilise. In this context, formal IAG fulfils a crucial role by challenging thinking and self-perceptions, including learner confidence in their ability to make effective decisions, and plugging gaps in learners' knowledge and understanding.

Learners access formal IAG in a variety of ways including face-to-face, by telephone, email and via the internet. Despite young people's preference for face-to-face delivery, current reforms to career guidance for this group place less emphasis on this mode, favouring instead telephone and online provision. In this context, learners need to be supported to develop a more sophisticated understanding of their readiness to make career-decisions and the type of intervention that could best meet their needs, including the role and value of local labour market information, telephone advice and the wider career support market. Integrated programmes of career learning could also make an important contribution in this regard.

The future of IAG policy

Radical reforms to career guidance in England have been introduced which are impacting on the extent, nature and delivery of CLIAG for young people and adults. The perceived strengths of the new arrangements include the opportunity to track learners, the online service and face-to-face provision for adults. However, the guidance sector has also expressed a range of concerns about the reforms. Principal among these are the erosion of face-to-face guidance as well as the quality and impartiality of services for young people

and the implications this could have for decision-making, recruitment, retention and achievement in the FE and Skills sector.

The findings suggest that young people rather than adults are the main 'consumers' of formal IAG and that this group is more likely to express a preference for, and need, face-to-face interventions. There appears, therefore, to be somewhat of a disconnect between demand for services and the current direction of career guidance policy. This suggests that more needs to be done to ensure that the 'learner voice' is adequately reflected in future developments of both policy and practice.

Issues and challenges

The key issues and challenges for policy-makers and IAG and learning providers include:

- **Defining service levels**: In the absence of a mandatory framework for CLIAG provision in the FE and Skills sector, a key task is to decide how individuals' needs are to be identified and met.

- **Developing information sources:** Information, including destination data and labour market intelligence, must be analysed and interpreted and made available in accessible and usable forms for advisers and clients.

- **Developing delivery models:** Delivery modes are required that take account of the relationship between internal 'formal' provision, 'informal' support available to specific individuals (e.g. from employers, friends and families) and the wider 'career support market'.

- **Resourcing**: There is a clear implication in current Government policy that more will have to be delivered for less. A key area for providers will be to consider how services are resourced in the future.

- **Staff development**: A wide range of staff in the FE and Skills sector are involved in the delivery of CLIAG. Addressing skill needs and gaps at all levels is a key priority, drawing on the range of resources that have been developed by LSIS and others to support this process.

- **Research and evaluation**: Given a fast-changing policy environment, limited resources, and a challenging labour market, it is vitally important to be clear about what needs to be done to meet individuals' needs and wider policy goals. Research can fulfil a crucial role by helping to establish what works for whom, when, why, and how. Key priorities are to examine the specific needs of different learner groups in the FE and Skills sector, including their reasons and motivations for accessing CLIAG and their satisfaction with existing provision, and to monitor the impact of the reforms, including any changes in the extent and nature of demand for services and the impact on providers.

1 | Introduction

This report presents the findings of research undertaken by CFE on behalf of the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) and National Union of Students (NUS) to develop a more sophisticated understanding of Career Learning, Information, Advice and Guidance (CLIAG) for learners engaged with the Further Education (FE) and Skills sector.

The research was conducted between July and December 2011. The 'top-down, bottom-up' approach examined the perspectives of policy-makers and stakeholder organisations, IAG and learning providers, and learners about to enter, studying in, or with recent experience of the FE and Skills system.

Research background

There is a plethora of research evidence to demonstrate the positive impact that good quality and timely CLIAG can have on learning and career decision-making.[1] However, until recently, research in this area has predominantly focused on young people and the field of CLIAG in post-compulsory learning has been somewhat neglected. Over the last 15 years, a body of evidence has begun to accumulate that identifies a number of weaknesses in the extent and nature of CLIAG provision in the FE and Skills sector which could, as a result, be disadvantaging some groups, including vocational learners and those who already experience other forms of social or economic disadvantage.[2]

The implications of these weaknesses for learners, as well as for providers and the wider economy, are potentially far reaching; the consequences of poor decision-making on entry to the FE and Skills sector can impact on the retention, achievement and progression of learners which can, in turn, affect the supply of skills to the labour market. Improving the UK skills base is central to current government policy[3] and is a key objective underpinning radical reforms to the FE and Skills system[4]. These reforms are designed to offer individuals (and employers) increased flexibility and choice while ensuring they take greater ownership and responsibility for their own learning and continued professional development (CPD). The role and importance of CLIAG in supporting the achievement of these aims is recognised at the highest level:

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[1] Bowes, L., Smith, D. and Morgan, S. (2005) *Reviewing the Evidence Base for Careers Work in Schools A systematic review of research literature into the impact of career education and guidance during Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 on young people's transition.* Derby: CeGS
[2] Examples of these include: The evaluations of the 14–19 Pathfinders, the Increased Flexibility Programme for 14–16 year olds and the End-to-End Review of Careers Education and Guidance
[3] Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, (2010) *Skills for Sustainable Growth.* London: BIS
[4] Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, (2011) *New Challenges, New Chances: Next Steps in Implementing the Further Education Reform Programme.* London: BIS

"We know that high quality careers advice is crucial in helping young people make the right choices about their future careers and supporting vulnerable young people to overcome barriers to entering employment, training or higher education." [5]

<div align="right">

John Hayes, Minister for Further Education,
Skills & Lifelong Learning

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In December 2010, the Government announced plans to introduce a new National Careers Service (NCS) which, following consultation and development work, will be launched in April 2012.

Research aims and objectives

It was within this dynamic policy environment that CFE was commissioned to undertake research to explore:

- policy perspectives on CLIAG in the FE and Skills sector;
- the learner experience of CLIAG provision prior to entering learning, whilst on a programme, and when considering progression routes into and through the FE and Skills sector; and
- the emerging challenges and opportunities for the provision of CLIAG in the FE and Skills sector, including its role and importance in raising aspirations and supporting learners to progress into positive destinations.

The aim was to develop an understanding of the needs of learners within the FE and Skills system and the extent to which these are being met.

Methodology

The research was conducted in a number of phases which formed a 'top-down, bottom-up' review of CLIAG in the FE and Skills sector.

Top-down review

This stage of the research investigated how IAG is currently delivered in the FE and Skills sector and the ways in which recent changes in policy are likely to impact on individual learners and wider stakeholders. The 'top-down' review comprised **desk-based research** of CLIAG policy and the available literature relating to the provision of CLIAG in the FE and Skills sector, and 18 **in-depth interviews** with policy-makers and senior representatives of national and local bodies including membership organisations, IAG service providers and FE and Skills providers (see Appendix 1 for a full list of participating organisations.) The interviews explored stakeholders' understanding of the needs of learners in the FE and Skills sector, the vision and purpose of the new NCS, as well as the likely challenges and opportunities it engenders.

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[5] http://www.icg-uk.org/article808.html

Bottom-up review

This stage of the research explored the views and experiences of learners who were about to enter, currently studying in, or had recently left FE and Skills provision. Through a combination of an **online survey**, **individual interviews** and **focus group discussions**, learners were encouraged to reflect on their decision to enter the FE and Skills sector, the sources of IAG they accessed to support the decision-making process and the value and influence of that support. They were also asked to reflect on the extent and importance of their own decision-making skills and the likelihood that they would seek formal and/or informal IAG with future decisions about learning or work.

Respondent profile

The online survey was disseminated by LSIS and NUS using their networks and contacts within the FE and Skills sector. Screening questions were included to ensure that only eligible respondents completed the survey and were included in the analysis. The survey was also distributed to eligible members of the Learner Panel which is managed by OpinionPanel on behalf of the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) and is co-funded with the Skills Funding Agency and Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). CFE offered a prize draw to help maximise the response rate. A total of 1,230 useable responses were achieved.

The majority of respondents reported that they are currently studying in the FE and Skills sector (79.8%), whilst the remainder indicated that they had either completed a course in the last 12 months (15.2%) or were about to start a course in the next three months (5.0%). The majority of respondents study/studied full-time (73.3%). Almost equal proportions of learners are/were studying academic (40.3%) and vocational programmes (41.1%), most commonly at Level 3 (61.1%).

In terms of learner numbers, General Further Education (GFE) colleges are by far the biggest provider of FE and Skills in the UK. According to ILR[6] data there were 2,317,830 learners studying at a GFE college[7] in 2009–2010, representing 50 per cent of all learners; a further 21.3 per cent were studying at a private training provider, 4.0 per cent were studying at a sixth form college and 3.5 per cent at a specialist college. Over three-fifths (62.8%) of survey respondents study/studied at a GFE college (slightly more than the national proportion); however, learners studying with other key provider types are also represented within the sample (Figure 1).

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[6] Individual Learner Record data.
[7] The data service (2011) *FE and Skills.* http://mireportslibrary.thedataservice.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/49370DDC-4C3E-452C-948C-AA2E1FD10F37/0/FEandSkills_providertype_finalV3.xls
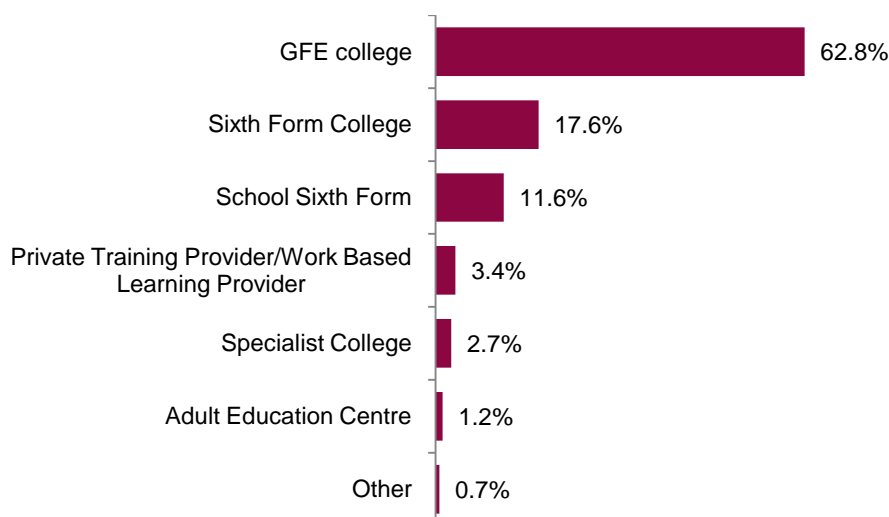
Figure 1: Type of post-16 provider learner was studying with, had studied with, or planned to study with, base = 1,230

Just over half the sample are female (52.7%) and a quarter describe themselves as belonging to a minority ethnic group (23.9%). The majority of respondents are under 25 (86.3%) and 3.9 per cent are aged 45 or over. Just over one in ten respondents indicate that they have a learning difficulty, disability or health condition (12.7%) and 2.1% have been convicted of a criminal offence. Just under two-fifths of respondents work at least part-time (43.5%); one in eight lives in a household where no one currently works (12.5%). Just over two-fifths of respondents are in receipt of some form of financial assistance such as a grant or bursary or help with childcare costs (42.3%). A full breakdown of the sample profile is provided in Appendix 2.

Follow-up telephone interviews were conducted with 20 survey respondents in order to explore the reasons behind learners' decisions to enter the FE and Skills system and their perceptions and experiences of the support they received. This qualitative data was further supplemented with data from two focus group discussions with vocational and work-based learners. The interviewees were selected to represent a cross section of IAG service users and non-users studying in a range of contexts within the FE and Skills sector.

The findings reported are based on the data gathered during the fieldwork, supplemented where appropriate with evidence from existing research. The survey data has been analysed to identify evidence of statistically significant relationships and trends for specific respondent sub-groups, including those that may be disadvantaged because of a learning difficulty, disability or health condition, a criminal conviction, or low household income. However, it should be noted that the small number of responses in some sub-categories militates against analysis at this level in some instances. Illustrative quotations are used throughout to add qualitative depth to the statistical data.

Definition of terms

In the context of this report, **'FE and Skills'** is used as a collective term to refer to the range of learning providers delivering post-compulsory education and training including: general further education (GFE) colleges; sixth form colleges and school sixth forms; work-based learning (WBL); adult and community learning (ACL); offender learning; and specialist colleges.

Young people and adults receiving education or training from these provider types are referred to as **'learners'** throughout this report.

'CLIAG' in the learning and skills sector is defined as the help and support learners receive in order to reach their potential by: ensuring placement on correct programmes; addressing barriers; supporting them on programme to reach their learning goals and increase their employability; and facilitating next steps and progression. It is also designed to improve their ability to manage their career and pathway throughout life.[8] The term **'help and support'** was used as a proxy for CLIAG in the online survey and interviews with learners to overcome any ambiguity and/or lack of understanding of the terms 'career learning' and 'IAG'[9].

It is recognised that learners in the FE and Skills system receive CLIAG from a wide range of sources, both formal and informal. The term **'professional IAG'** is used in this report to refer to *formal* help and support provided by career professionals employed by an organisation where IAG is the main focus, such as Connexions, Next Step and institutional careers services[10].

The term '**informal IAG'** is used to refer to the help provided by informed non-career professionals working in the FE and Skills sector but whose main focus is not IAG (e.g. non-careers teaching staff and learner support staff in schools, colleges and private training providers and staff working in organisations including recruitment agencies, Jobcentre Plus, the Probation Service, Social Services or the Youth Service who do not have a careers-related qualification) as well as the support offered by family, friends and work colleagues.

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[8] LSIS (2010) *Career Learning for the 21st Century – Effective Practice and Partnership Working.* Coventry: LSIS.
[9] The term 'Information, Advice and Guidance' (IAG) was used to refer to the activities of careers guidance in the White Paper 'Learning to Succeed' (DfEE, 1999). This terminology has been subsequently embedded in various policy documents (e.g. DCSF, The Children's Plan (2007)), as an umbrella term that covers a range of activities that help young people become more self-reliant and better equipped to manage their own learning and personal career development.
[10] It is important to note that career professionals work in a variety of contexts and in multiple roles. The distinction between them is largely determined by the funding streams available for services targeted at different groups. As a result, some service users, including respondents to the learner survey, may not be aware which organisation is providing (funding) the service they receive.

This report

After this introduction, the rest of the report is structured as follows: Section 2 provides an overview of current IAG policy in the context of wider reforms to the FE and Skills sector; Section 3 examines the factors that influence decisions about learning and work and the process learners go through in order to arrive at their decisions; Section 4 explores how services are currently delivered, perceptions of current provision, and preferences for future provision; Section 5 examines learners' perspectives on the skills they need to make effective decisions and succeed in learning and work; in Section 6 the issues and challenges associated with the delivery of CLIAG in the FE and Skills sector are discussed in the context of the evidence from learners and key stakeholders.

2 | Context

This section provides an overview of current IAG policy in the context of wider reforms to the Further Education and Skills sector. It also considers existing views on IAG from a range of perspectives.

The Further Education and Skills sector

The FE and Skills sector in England is complex[11] and multi-faceted. The Ofsted Chief Inspector's Report[12] indicates that around *"1,300 different providers operate in the learning and skills sector and they vary considerably in scale. The smallest organisations provide education and training to fewer than 10 learners, whereas the largest cater for more than 160,000".* The report notes that providers in the FE and Skills sector primarily cater for young people aged over 16 and adults, but some also offer education and training for young people aged 14 to 16[13.] ILR data[14] indicates that 3,129,200 learners aged 19 years and over participated in some form of Government-funded FE or skills training in 2010–11, of whom 739,300 were aged 19–24 and 2,390,000 were aged 25 or over.

In the sector, a wide range of public and private sector organisations deliver qualifications and non-accredited training in a variety of settings (including institution, work and community-based) as well as virtually through distance or blended learning. With its firm commitment to widening participation, the sector serves individuals with learning needs ranging from entry level qualifications, through ESOL[15] to higher education and professional training[16]. Additionally, the sector is the main provider for post-16 learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Additionally, a higher than average proportion of learners in the FE and Skills sector describe themselves as belonging to an ethnic minority group and live in disadvantaged postcode areas when compared with the population as a whole.[17] As a consequence, the FE and Skills sector is particularly well-placed to address issues such as raising aspirations, tackling disadvantage[18] and increasing social mobility[19].

This diverse sector has been operating in a dynamic policy environment for many years, driven by political imperatives to address skills deficiencies and drive up productivity. Since 1997, successive governments have issued a

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[11] An indication of the complexity here is in relation to the inter-face between the FE and Skills sector and the wider Welfare-to-Work Sector in the context of the delivery of coherent employment and skills services

[12] Ofsted (2011) *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and* Skills 2010/11 Norwich: TSO

[13] DfE (2011) *Review of Vocational Education: The Wolf Report.* London: DfE.

[14] BIS (2011a) *New Challenges, New Chances: FE & Skills System Reform Plan: Building a World Class Skills System.* London: BIS.

[15] English for Speakers of Other Languages

[16] AoC (2010) *College Key Facts: Summer 2010.* London: AoC.

[17] Foster A (2005) *Realising the potential: A review of the future role of further education colleges.* Nottingham: DfES Publications.

[18] Buddery, P., Kippin, H. & Lucas, B. (2011) *The further education and skills sector in 2020: a social productivity approach.* London: 2020 Public Services Hub.

[19] BIS (2011b) *Social Mobility: A Literature Review.* London: BIS.

total of nine White Papers and five other major policy statements on skills. The rate at which policy has altered, and the volume of initiatives that have emerged, has left an already-complex sector in a constant state of flux. Recent attempts to develop a coherent framework for the FE and Skills sector included the Foster Review[20], which set out a vision for a system focused on learner achievement and community impact. Foster's aim was to create an environment in which young people and adults could achieve their full potential and contribute to national prosperity and social cohesion. He emphasised the importance of collaboration and specialisation for increased learner choice and streamlined progression pathways underpinned by effective IAG.

Five years on, in November 2010, the Coalition Government published its skills[21] and accompanying investment strategy[22]. These documents set out significant reforms to adult learning and skills based upon the principles of fairness, responsibility and freedom. The Government's strategy takes a wider view of the FE and Skills system than seen in previous White Papers and acknowledges the sector's role in promoting social inclusion and mobility as well as skills. In December 2011, following extensive consultation, the Government launched 'New Challenges, New Chances', its reform plan designed to place *"students at the heart of the FE and skills system"*, *"supporting students where it can have most impact"*, and ensuring that qualifications are *"high quality and easy to understand"*. [23]

Details of the new National Careers Service (NCS) are also set out in the reform plan which indicates that the NCS *"will provide information, advice and guidance both to inform and to stimulate demand for further education, work-based training and higher education"*, with, Lifelong Learning Accounts[24] providing *"learners with the information they need to make the most of their learning opportunities"*.

The plan also states that *"schools will be responsible for securing access to independent, impartial careers guidance for their pupils"* and, in line with the policy of raising the participation age to 18 by 2015, that BIS *"will shortly be consulting on extending this duty to 16-18 year olds in school and further education settings"*. In order to support schools to discharge their duties, the Department for Education will provide statutory guidance and support the sharing of best practice. In pursuit of an overtly demand-led[25], customer-driven system, improved access to better quality information for learners will replace Government-based quality assurance systems.

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[20] Foster, A. (2005) *Realising the potential: A review of the future role of further education colleges.* Nottingham: DfES Publications.
[21] BIS (2010) *Skills for Sustainable Growth.* London: BIS.
[22] BIS (2010) *Investing in Skills for Sustainable Growth.* London: BIS.
[23] BIS (2011) *New Challenges, New Chances: FE & Skills System Reform Plan: Building a World Class Skills System* London: BIS.
[24] Some commentators (e.g. Wolf, A. (2010) *How to shift power to learners: Encouraging FE dynamism, replacing centralised procurement.* London: LSN) have gone further in advocating for: 'individual, money based systems which give individuals purchasing power: 'achieved by a combination of subsidised loans and learning accounts which are genuine accounts'.
[25] UKCES (2010) *Ambition 2020: World Class Skills and Jobs for the UK.* London: UKCES.

IAG Policy

Over the past century IAG policy in England has persistently emphasised the importance and desirability of matching individuals to the needs of the labour market[26]. This 'matching' approach is based on a model of careers progression which assumes that individuals possess a set of abilities, traits or talents that can be measured objectively and 'matched' to occupational environments that conform with their profiles.

This approach to career progression is driven by a rational model of careers identity and development. Within this paradigm, once individuals have arrived at their 'rational' career decision, they implement the action necessary to achieve their goal. However, there is growing consensus regarding the inadequacies of these traditional theories that still inform career guidance practice. [27] A key limitation is that they assume a degree of stability in the labour market and in the abilities and potential of individuals[28], thus failing to provide an adequate explanation of vocational behaviour, especially amongst groups suffering labour market disadvantage.

Systems for the delivery of publicly-funded careers information, advice and guidance have been subject to considerable change over recent years[29]. The most significant changes have been in relation to services for young people (aged 13–19), where concerns have been raised about their impact on service availability, quality of delivery and indeed on the wider career profession.

The Coalition Government has enacted a raft of policies and funding decisions which are radically reframing the way in which careers work is delivered to young people. Hooley and Watts[30] argue that key elements of the 'new policy environment' include:

- The removal of the requirement for schools to provide careers education and the enactment instead in the Education Act 2011[31] of a new statutory duty to *"ensure that all registered pupils at the school are provided with independent careers guidance during the relevant phase of their education"*, though with the clarification (in the authors' view) that *"this can be met, minimally, through providing access to web-based or telephone services"*.

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[26] Bimrose, J. & Barnes, S.-A. (2007) *Navigating the Labour Market: Career Decision Making and the Role of Guidance.* Coventry, Warwick Institute for Employment Research and Department for Education and Skills.

[27] Savickas, M.L. (1997) *Constructivist career counseling: models and methods.* Advances in Personal Construct Psychology, 4 (2), pp.149–182.

[28] Keep, E. & Brown, A. (2005) *Moving beyond discussions about paradigm shifts – creating space for multiple meanings and narratives on changing patterns of employment and careers Career Research & Development -* NICEC, & VT Career Management.

[29] Ofsted (2010) *Moving through the system – information, advice and guidance.* Manchester: Ofsted.

[30] Hooley, T. & Watts, A.G. (2011) *Careers Work with Young People: Collapse or Transition? An analysis of current developments in careers education and guidance for young people in England.* Derby: iCeGS. http://www.derby.ac.uk/files/careers_transition_paper.pdf

[31] See: http://www.education.gov.uk/aboutdfe/departmentalinformation/educationbill/a0073748/education-bill (Accessed 22 December 2011)

- *"The merger of Connexions funding into the Early Intervention Grant, which is to be reduced by 10.9% to £2,212m in 2011/12 and then increased by 3.8% to £2,297m in 2012/13".*

- *"The effective deletion, through a combination of cuts and the removal of responsibility, of around £200 million of funding (the notional careers-related Connexions funding) from the careers sector".*

- *"Guidance from the Department for Education (2011)[32] which indicates that Local Authorities no longer have a responsibility to provide universal careers services".*

- The development of NCS, which (in the authors' view) is *"theoretically an all-age service but in practice is to be mainly focused on adult advice and guidance (supported by funding of £84 million from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills), with its services for young people confined to telephone- and web-based services (supported by funding from the Department for Education of, probably, less than £7 million)".*

- *"The lack of any strategic transitional plan from the Government".*

A range of bodies have been seeking to influence Government thinking on the development of IAG policy[33]. New thinking on the development of career guidance services increasingly looks at this in the context of developing 'career support markets'[34]. Within this is the central notion that, in practice, individuals access a variety of support (both formal and informal) during the course of their 'career journey' from different sources, including increasingly through ICT (including developing Web 2.0 and 3.0 technologies).[35]

There has been considerable discussion in recent years regarding how policy might relate to a market in career support[36]. In this discussion, Government is seen as fulfilling three main roles:

- stimulating the career support market in order to build its capacity;

- regulating this market and assuring the quality of services within it; and

- compensating for market failures.

Hooley and Watts[37] argue that in the current period of transition the Government appears *"to be stimulating the career support market in terms of entrepreneurial activity".* However, they contend that the decision to transfer responsibility to schools (and indeed colleges) without any discernible funding is likely to reduce substantially the overall capacity to deliver career support for young people. They argue that where this transfer has been attempted

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[32] Department for Education (2011) *Statutory guidance for Local Authorities on targeted support services for young people.* http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/l/la%20guidance%20april%202011.pdf
[33] See, for example, Career's England latest Policy Commentary (Accessed 22 December 2011): http://www.careersengland.org.uk/documents/Public/Policy%20Commentary%2015A.pdf
[34] UKCES (2011) *Helping Individuals Succeed: Transforming Career Guidance.* London: UKCES.
[35] Hooley, T., Hutchinson, J. & Watts A.G. (2010) *Enhancing Choice? The Role of Technology in the Career Support Market.* London: UKCES.
[36] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2004) *Career Guidance and Public Policy: Bridging the Gap.* Paris: OECD.
[37] *Op. Cit.*

elsewhere in the world (notably, in New Zealand and the Netherlands) there has been erosion of services.[38]

On the issue of the Government's potential role in the 'regulation' of career support, Hooley and Watts argue that the Government's stance *"seems ambivalent"*. Whilst they 'welcomed' the report of the Careers Profession Task Force[39] – and have indicated that its recommendations would inform Government policy in this area – they argue this has not so far stretched to specifying that schools and colleges *"must work with a quality-assured professional service in offers that they develop"*. Moreover, although Hooley and Watts acknowledge that the Government has indicated *"a commitment to inspect careers provision via Ofsted"*, they caution that "*the policy is currently to maintain a light-touch approach"*.

Finally, Hooley and Watts argue that *"the question of compensating for market failure remains largely unanswered".* The policy of school/college autonomy inevitably means that there will be a range of different practices across different learning providers. It seems likely that this diversity will be experienced both in terms of the approach to delivery and in the level of engagement with the concept of career support. However, Hooley and Watts indicate that *"it is not clear what the Government would consider to be a market failure in this area'* and therefore they contend that it is *'uncertain whether and when it would act, and on what basis"*.

Views on current CLIAG provision in the FE and skills sector

During their extensive work on 'Career Learning for the 21st Century', LSIS defined effective practice in CLIAG in the FE and Skills sector as that which:

> *"Helps learners to reach their potential by ensuring placement on correct programmes, addressing barriers, supporting them on programmes to reach their learning goals and increase their employability, and facilitating next steps and progression. It also improves their ability to manage their career and pathway throughout life".[40]*

LSIS indicated that key features of effective practice are likely to include provision that: motivates and raises aspirations and confidence; expands young people's understanding of the world of work and learning, and ways of entering these such as through work-related experiences and tasters; and helps young people to make wise decisions about learning and work options.

Research[41] indicates that leaders in the learning and skills sector value CLIAG. The reasons for this include the intelligence it provides for planning purposes and the contribution it makes to enhancing the organisation's

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[38] Watts, A.G. (2011). The emerging policy model for career guidance in England: some lessons from international examples. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling.*
[39] Careers Profession Task Force (2010) *Towards a Strong Careers Profession.* London: Department for Education.
[40] LSIS (2010) *Career Learning for the 21st Century – Effective Practice and Partnership Working.* Coventry: LSIS.
[41] LSIS (2010) *Career Learning for the 21st Century – A leadership issue for the FE Sector.* Coventry: LSIS.

reputation in the community through the provision of impartial advice. However, most frequently cited is the impact that effective CLIAG can have on recruitment and admissions and the retention and progression of learners.[42]

The level of CLIAG provision in GFE colleges is generally held to be variable[43] and reviews have frequently concluded that young people in the 14–19 phase of education want more support with decision-making, particularly at key transition points.[44] Historically, colleges benefited along with schools from 'partnership working' with Connexions, including the provision of additional professional support and training and information (including career-related Labour Market Information (LMI)). With a focus on the most disadvantaged, the decrease in levels of external support from Connexions/Careers Services to average and above-average young people both in schools and colleges has been raised by many in the field as a significant concern. [45]

Overall, however, there is a restricted amount of direct research to evidence strengths and weaknesses in the current system. For example, Ofsted's thematic IAG review, *'Moving through the system'*[46], commented on services in primary and secondary schools, in Local Authorities and in Next Step services for adults, but not in the FE sector. Research by LSIS[47] summarises the existing evidence on CLIAG in the FE and Skills sector. It identifies a number of weaknesses in existing provision, which include:

- insufficient focus pre-16 on the range of learning pathways available, particularly through work-based learning and on the longer-term career implications of subject choices;

- less adequate provision pre-entry and post-exit from the FE and Skills sector;

- inconsistency in the quality of the CLIAG delivered to learners on different sites including those based in the workplace;

- limited access to IAG for part-time learners; and

- variability in the provision of advice and guidance for learners studying HE in FE.

This is not to say that other bodies are unaware of the issues. For example, YPLA indicated that *"we are concerned about the high number of 17 year olds dropping out from full-time education and we have launched an investigation into this issue",* indicating that *"we believe that better impartial advice and*

[42] Sadler, J. (2002*) First Impressions Count: How effective recruitment and admissions can encourage students to stay at college.* London: LSDA.
[43] Thomson, S., Donohue, J., Fiehn, T. & Miller, A. (Eds.) (2006) *Putting Learners First. Book 3. 14–19: Programme of Support for Delivery of Change on the Ground. 14-19 Strategic Planning: A Practical Handbook for Schools, Colleges and their Partners.* London: LSDA.
[44] Ofsted (2005) *Developing a coherent 14–19 phase of education and training.* Manchester: Ofsted.
[45] Skills Commission (2005) *Inspiration and Aspiration: Realising our potential in the 21st Century. The final report of the Skill's Commission's inquiry into IAG.* London: Skill's Commission.
[46] Ofsted (2010) *Moving through the system – information, advice and guidance.* Manchester: Ofsted.
[47] LSIS (2010) *Career Learning for the 21st Century – A leadership issue for the FE Sector.* Coventry: LSIS.

guidance and more flexible provision will help tackle this issue". Concerns have been raised too about skills gaps amongst staff delivering IAG[48&49].

Learners' views

In recent years, a range of studies have considered the views of learners (and the wider population) regardingthe ways in which their CLIAG support needs are met.

Although the National Learner Satisfaction Survey (NLSS) arguably focuses more on 'learner support' than CLIAG, the findings indicate that the vast majority (87%) of learners believe that the support they receive on their course or learning programme is 'good', with half (52%) describing it as 'very good'. [50] Learners need support with a range of issues while on programme. Over two-fifths (44%) of respondents to the NLSS report experiencing at least one type of problem, such as keeping up with work, motivation, travel and money pressure, or dealing with other external pressures. These issues can all impact on an individual's decisions about learning and work, both now and in the future, and are important factors in any IAG intervention, including 'informal' support provided by tutors.

Most learners (87%) report that they received good information when choosing their course. Information about the course itself was viewed particularly positively, although learners report that they were less well-informed about factors such as overall pass or success rates and access to financial support. After induction, 93 per cent of learners report that they felt well informed about the course content (a rise of 4% since 2007). Learners undertaking Entry Level or Level 1 qualifications generally expressed higher satisfaction. Although older learners (aged 25 or over) tend to be more positive about their learning experience, they are less likely to report that they received good information when choosing the course and at the time of enrolment.

Informal IAG is widely used and is highly influential amongst learners of all ages. Research undertaken by MORI in 2005[51] indicates that adults use IAG primarily to seek out opportunities to gain and/or update their skills and qualifications or to find a job. Employers are one of the most important sources of help, but the internet is increasingly fulfilling a key role.

'Informal' sources of help, such as support from parents, are similarly reported to be the most widely accessed, as well as the most influential, sources of IAG for young people. However, some informal networks are better equipped to support young people than others and, overall, are highly

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[48] LSC (2007) *Mapping Staff Competence and Capacity to Plan and Deliver IAG to Adults in LSC-funded provision.* Research Report. Coventry: LSC.

[49] TBR (2009) *Skills Needs and Training Supply for Career Guidance - A Gap Analysis* Report for LLUK and UKCES. Newcastle: TBR.

[50] BIS (2011) *National Learner Satisfaction Survey: Further Education Research Study.* Research Report 11. London: BIS.

[51] Yaylor, J., Vasicckova, D., Byram, A., & Dickson, J. (2005) *Demand for, and perceptions of information, advice and guidance.* Leicester: Guidance Council.

unlikely to present a complete picture.[52] In addition, career choice can be skewed or limited by the explicit or implicit assumptions of parents, friends and/or communities regarding the value of continued education and the merits of particular occupations/sectors.[53] Further research[54] suggests that young people also need access to support from tutors and other impartial advisers, particularly if they are considering vocational routes and/or their parents have lower level qualifications, to fill any gaps in their knowledge and understanding and to challenge their thinking. However, not all learners get access to this form of support. [55]

In summary, IAG and learning providers serving the FE and Skills sector have been operating in a dynamic environment for a number of years, which has had important implications for the level and nature of the CLIAG services provided. Although some learner groups have been well-served with positive effects, there is evidence of weaknesses in formal IAG provision, particularly for those following non-traditional routes. The most recent changes to CLIAG in England could, according to some commentators in the field, reduce rather than improve formal IAG services, particularly for young people. This issue, coupled with the diversity in the characteristics and needs of the learner population, creates a number of challenges for those seeking to support learners as they journey into and through the FE and Skills system, to make effective decisions, succeed in their learning, and progress into productive jobs in the labour market. These issues are identified and considered in light of the evidence from learners and key stakeholders that was captured during this research in the concluding chapter of this report.

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[52] Semple, S., Howieson, C. & Paris, M. (2002) *Young People's Transitions: Careers Support from Family and Friends.* University of Edinburgh: CES.
[53] Chant, A. (2010) *Parental Influence – the enemy or an untapped partnership The Association for Careers Education and Guidance (ACEG).* Careers Education and Guidance, June 10.
[54] Battersham, J., & Leversley, T. (2011) *New Directions: Young people's and their parents' views of cocational education and careers guidance.* London: Chrysalis Research/City & Guilds Centre for Skills Development.
[55] Semple S., Howieson C. & Paris M. (2002) *Young People's Transitions: Careers Support from Family and Friends.* University of Edinburgh: CES.

3 | The decision-making process

This section examines the characteristics of the learner population and the services that they access for help and support with decision-making. It explores the factors that influence learners' decisions prior to entering the FE and Skills system and how learners make decisions, including who they speak to and why.

Learners' IAG needs

We noted previously that learners in the FE and Skills sector are highly diverse in terms of their personal characteristics and circumstances, and individual goals and aspirations. Although this study was designed to explore the experiences of all types of learner, those from disadvantaged groups provide a particular focus. Although this group is in itself heterogeneous, previous research shows that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds often have lower levels of aspiration than those from more privileged backgrounds[56] which can contribute to lower levels of attainment at school[57]; poor attainment impacts on an individual's life chances, including the learning and career options available to them. In addition, disadvantaged groups typically have *"less access to social networks for advice about higher education and work than their richer peers"*[58], which can also be a limiting factor, particularly in relation to social mobility. This contrasts with some other learner groups who have access to extensive and informed personal and professional networks, who are highly motivated, and who aspire to clearly articulated learning and career goals[59].

A learner's motivations and aspirations, coupled with their personal circumstances, have a significant influence over their learning and career decisions as well as the extent and type of CLIAG and learner support they need and seek. Several stakeholders interviewed emphasise that the type and nature of the queries they deal with are as numerous as the learners they see, ranging from help with financial, housing and/or childcare issues, through advice on the progression routes and employment opportunities associated with different qualifications, to support for adult returners seeking a change of career:

[56] *Careers Profession Task Force: Towards a strong careers profession:* An independent report to the Department for Education. October 2010.

[57] Goodman, A. & Gregg, P. (2010) *The Importance of Attitudes and Behaviour for Poorer Children's Educational Attainment.* Joseph Rowntree Foundation (p.1).

[58] *Careers Profession Task Force: Towards a strong careers profession:* An independent report to the Department for Education, October 2010.

[59] Bowes, L. (2008) *Mapping IAG & Learner Support for Vocational & Work-based Learners in Birmingham, the Black Country & Solihull.* The Birmingham, Black Country and Solihull (BBCS) Lifelong Learning Network.

"Every individual needs different help and support, even where it looks as though they're all doing the same thing. For instance, let's say a sixth form college, which has offered principally A levels and academic study, even young people going into those will face a number of different barriers to learning and different needs, different understanding of what it is they're doing, and therefore will need different guidance...it's about their individual circumstances now."

<div align="right">

Stakeholder

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Identifying and addressing diverse needs at all stages of a learner's journey into and through post-compulsory education, therefore, represents a significant challenge for IAG and learning providers in the FE and Skills sector. In the sections that follow, we explore the process that learners go through in order to make decisions at key stages in their journey, taking account of the factors that shape and influence their decisions, in order to understand the reasons why learners seek different types of support and the influence it has on them as individuals and the decisions they take.

Decisions at the point of entry

Aspects of the decision-making process that learners go through at the outset of their journey into the FE and Skills system can differ substantively from those 'on programme' or 'on exit'. Most fundamental is the decision about whether to enter the sector, however, once this is decided, subsequent decisions about what, where, and how to study must be made. It is crucial that prospective learners get these decisions right because the consequences of poor decision-making at this stage are far-reaching for both individuals and learning providers. In order to develop a fuller understanding of the process and the role and influence that both formal and informal sources of IAG have, the research explored the factors that learners consider prior to entering the FE and Skills sector and the sources of IAG they access.

Key considerations

Survey respondents were asked to indicate whether they had considered specified factors when making the decision to study in the FE and Skills sector. Figure 2 demonstrates that the vast majority (88.8%) of learners, irrespective of age, considered the range of qualifications available to them before making their choice. Similar proportions also considered the potential job/career opportunities for people who complete their chosen course or qualification (81.3%) as well as potential progression routes into higher learning (79.5%).

"I'm doing three A-levels in order to get into university so it's pretty much full-time. I also got advice from the university as I didn't want to be doing a course that would prevent me from getting into [university]*."*

<div align="right">

Learner interviewee

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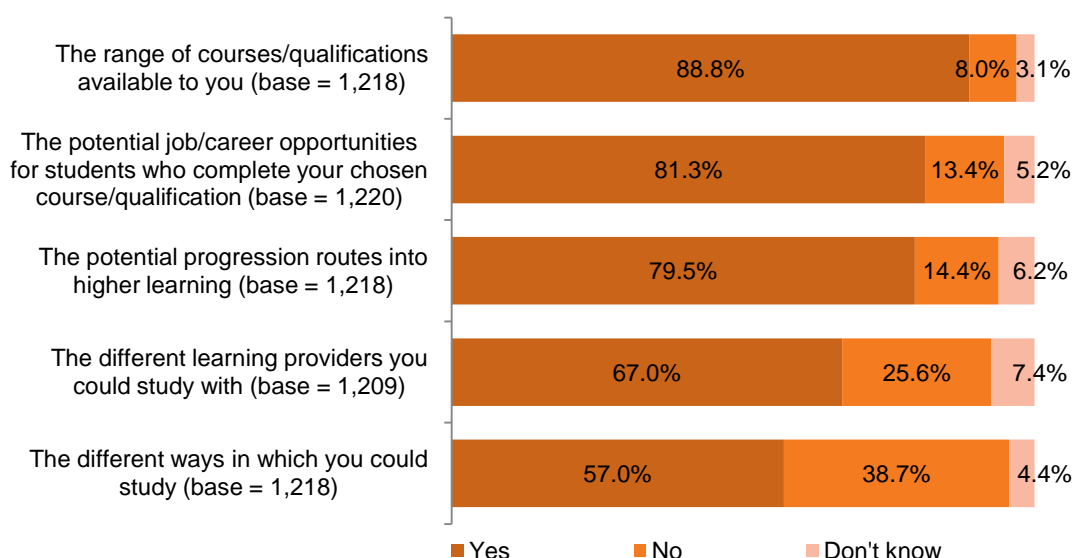
Figure 2: Whether respondent considered specified factors before deciding to study in the FE and Skills sector, base = variable

It is worth noting that although most considered future learning and career options, approximately a fifth of respondents did not. Further analysis reveals that those who did not consider their options before entering the FE and Skills sector were significantly less likely to have accessed help and support than those who did consider them. Over a tenth (12.6%) of respondents who did not consider 'potential progression routes into higher learning' and almost one in six (15.7%) respondents who did not consider the' potential job/career opportunities for someone with their chosen qualification' did not access any form of pre-entry IAG. This could have important implications for 'on programme' and 'on exit' CLIAG provision as learners seek to progress into opportunities that may not be available to them with their existing qualifications.

Over half of respondents gave some consideration to mode (57.0%) and place of study (67.0%), but these issues are less of a concern for a substantial minority. Further analysis reveals that older learners were significantly more likely to consider the different ways in which they could study than younger learners; seven out of ten learners (70.6%) aged 19 and over considered this prior to entry compared with just under half (48.7%) of 16–18 year olds.

The follow-up interviews with learners suggest that place of study may be less of a consideration for some learners because their choices are limited by personal preferences and/or external circumstances. For example, over one in ten respondents (11.0%) are employed on a full-time basis and studying part-time, often at the request of their employer. Decisions about where, as well as what and how to study, are likely to be taken by the employer in this case, particularly if they are funding the programme or supporting their staff member in another way, such as time off work for study.

> *"I recently won an award for customer service at work. My line manager suggested a course that they had been on that would tie the award to a qualification"*

<div align="right">Learner interviewee</div>

Indeed, focus group participants regard the involvement of their employer in the key decisions about what and where to study as an advantage. In addition to saving the learner time, some employers that invest heavily in work-based training have established links with providers who, as a result, understand the nature of the business and the pressures staff are under and can tailor provision around their working patterns which helps to alleviate some of the logistical challenges of combining work and study.

> *"Would I have liked to have had more choice about where to study? No.* [company] *has a good relationship with* [training provider] *because they have used them before. It saved me the hassle of searching for a course and when I got there it was set up on my rota. It was easier that way."*

<div align="right">Focus group participant</div>

For others, the decision about where and, to some extent, what to study was heavily influenced by the location of the provider. A number of interviewees expressed a preference for a local provider because they did not want to move house, or travel long distances to study and/or incur substantial travel costs, an issue which could be exacerbated by the removal of financial support such as Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA)[60]:

> *"I live with my parents and I don't want to move out"*

<div align="right">Focus group participant</div>

> *"I didn't want to go too far due to petrol costs."*

<div align="right">Learner interviewee</div>

For others living in more remote locations, the limited number of providers in the area governed their place of study as one learner commented, "*It was either one or the other that I could apply to really*". Finally, recommendations from friends and family members with direct experience of a particular provider and/or course also exerted a powerful influence over learner choice. As a result, some learners were less inclined to consider other provider options.

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[60] The EMA has been replaced by the 16-19 Bursary. Applicants for the new bursary are subject to different eligibility criteria and providers have greater discretion over who receives it and how frequently.

"My sister did this course and said it was good so I decided to do it."

"The college is in my neighbourhood, but I've got friends who are already there as well and they said nice things about it."

Support with decision-making

Pre-entry CLIAG can fulfil an important role in the decision-making process, supporting learners to overcome barriers to progression, make effective course choices, and ensure that they understand the implications of their choices for future learning and work options. However, existing research suggests that a number of learners do not make the right course choice at the pre-entry stage and that this is one of the most common reasons why learners leave a course early.[61] Further research found that only one-quarter of early leavers report receiving pre-entry IAG[62], suggesting that a lack of pre-entry IAG could be contributing to high dropout rates and that improvements in pre-entry IAG could have a beneficial effect on retention.

The majority of stakeholders interviewed shared these views and concerns, particularly in the context of current reforms to CLIAG which, it is feared, will reduce the level and type of support available to young people.

"I think for the further education sector, there's a particular concern about the increase in learners who will enrol at college and training without having had access to career guidance, and the impact that will then have on retention and achievement."

The stakeholders also argue that effective pre-entry IAG is crucial for helping learners from disadvantaged backgrounds in particular to address complex needs that extend beyond learning and include issues such as finance, housing, English language, childcare and/or health. Pre-entry IAG is recognised for playing a vital role in enabling learners to understand the support that is available to help them overcome these barriers, as well as subsequently ensuring they embark on a programme that is right for them:

"The picture you're getting is that it's not just about career choice...Those interactions from welfare to finance, you've got a hell of a lot going on there to support a learner."

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[61] Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. (2011). *National Learner Satisfaction Survey (NLSS): Highlights from 2009.* London: BIS.
[62] Simon, C., Page, R., & Miller, L. (2007). *Reasons for Early Leaving from FE and Work-Based Learning Courses.* London: DfES.

The evidence suggests that the decision to enter the FE and Skills sector is highly complex and is influenced by a range of factors, but that good quality and timely CLIAG can effectively support learners through the decision-making process. In the section that follows, we explore the sources of CLIAG that learners accessed prior to entry, including professional services such as Connexions and Next Step and informal sources of support such as friends and family; the type of help and support they received; and their perceptions of its influence over their decision-making process. We also explore the reasons why some learners did not access professional IAG services in order to assess whether this is the result of a lack of awareness, a lack of a perceived need, or for another reason.

Help and support accessed

The majority (92.4%) of respondents to the online survey accessed some form of IAG when making the decision to enter the FE and Skills sector. Learners typically drew on a number of different sources of IAG; some sought help from up to 11 but, on average, learners accessed 3 to 4 sources. The overwhelming majority of respondents accessed informal support. A third (34.8%) relied on this source alone but over half (54.7%) utilised it in conjunction with formal provision. Just 2.9 per cent of respondents accessed formal support only. These findings mirror existing research that suggests informal IAG is the most widely accessed form of support, and the most influential, particularly amongst vocational learners. [63]

Further analysis reveals that a range of factors influence whether an individual will access IAG and the type of IAG they will seek, including age, employment status, place and mode of study, eligibility for financial assistance, and current qualification level. Overall, young, full-time learners and those in receipt of financial assistance make most use of professional guidance services, typically in conjunction with informal support mechanisms. Conversely, older learners, those in full-time employment, and those who already possess a qualification at level 4 or above are significantly less likely to access professional IAG services, preferring to draw on their informal networks.

However, learners of all types who accessed professional IAG services were significantly more likely to also seek informal support from a range of sources than those who only sought informal support. The exception is support from an employer; 11.7 per cent of learners who did not access formal IAG sought support from their employer compared with just 4.7 per cent of those who did access formal support (see Table 1).

[63] Battersham, J., & Leversley, T. (2011) *New Directions: Young people's and their parents' views of vocational education and careers guidance.* London: Chrysalis Research/City & Guilds Centre for Skills Development.

Informal source of support	% of professional IAG service users who also accessed informal support (base = 700)	% of non-users who accessed informal support only (base = 515)
Friends/family	70.1%	54.8%
A tutor or teacher	59.4%	35.5%
Internet	49.7%	33.0%
Learning provider open day	20.4%	8.9%
Careers library and school/college or university	19.9%	5.4%
Learning provider prospectus	18.3%	13.4%
Employer	4.7%	11.7%

Table 1: Percentage of learners accessing different forms of informal IAG by whether they had also accessed professional IAG services, base = 1,215

In addition, users of professional careers services accessed a greater number of informal sources of IAG than those who used informal support only (on average, 2.7 sources compared with 2.1 sources). This indicates that learners who accessed professional support were significantly more likely to seek a wider variety of sources of help than those who had not.

Analysis by demographic characteristics (including gender, age, ethnicity, household income, presence of a learning difficulty, disability or health condition or a criminal conviction) reveals that age is the key determinant of pre-entry IAG service use. There is no statistically significant relationship between the other personal characteristics and access to formal and/or informal support. However, one in eight respondents (11.8%) from a household where no one currently works report that they did not access any form of support when making the decision to study in the FE and Skills sector, compared with just 3.6 per cent of those from households with an income of £40,000 or more. Although household income is just one indicator of disadvantage, these findings suggest that some individuals who may already be disadvantaged in the education system are not accessing support that could be beneficial in helping them to overcome barriers to education, raise their aspirations and succeed in learning.

Figure 3 demonstrates that learners aged 16 to 18 were significantly more likely to access both formal and informal pre-entry support (64.9%) than those aged 19–24 (49.8%) and 25 years or older (19.8%), particularly if they subsequently study full-time. Conversely, respondents aged 25 or older were significantly more likely to access informal support only (63.5%), or to not seek any form of pre-entry IAG (15.0%), than other age groups. This reflects existing research findings which also report that use of pre-entry IAG is

significantly higher among those aged 16–18 and studying full-time.[64] Coupled with the evidence of the positive impact that good quality IAG can have, these findings present policy-makers, as well as IAG and learning providers, with somewhat of a paradox in the context of current reforms which will result in a significant reduction in the extent and nature of provision for young people – the primary consumers of professional IAG services. We noted previously that the implications of this are potentially far reaching as poor decision-making impacts on individuals, learning providers and the wider economy.
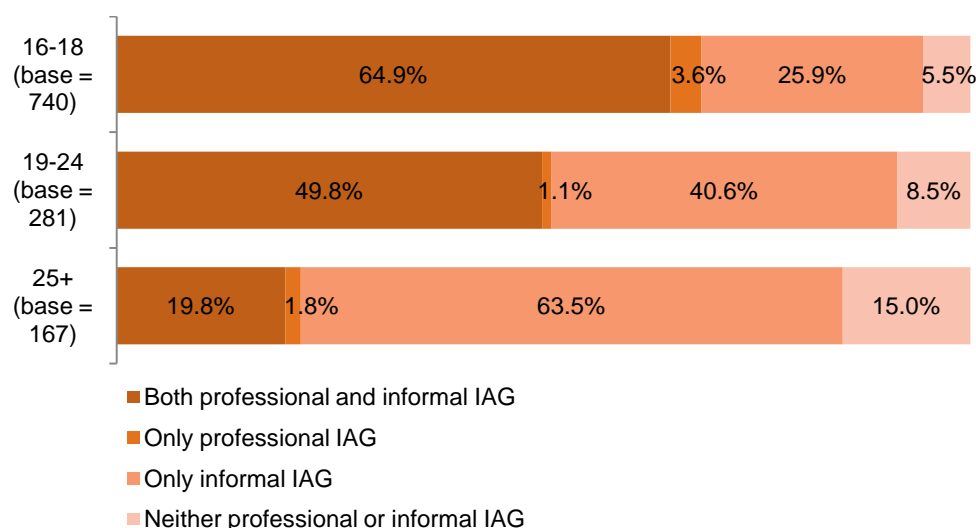
Figure 3: Type of support accessed by the learner to make decisions about studying in FE by age, base = variable

Employment status also has a significant influence on whether learners access pre-entry IAG. Those who work full-time are significantly less likely to have accessed professional IAG in addition to informal sources prior to entering the FE and Skills sector than those who work part-time, those who are not working but seeking employment, and those who are not working or looking for work at the present time (Figure 4).
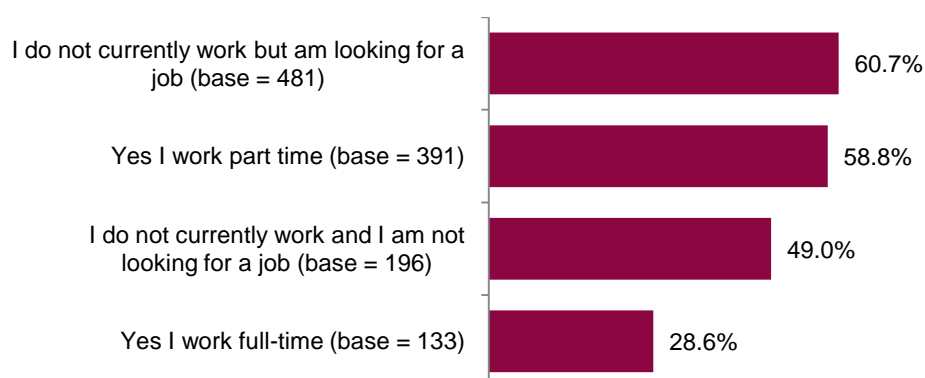
Figure 4: If learner accessed professional and informal IAG pre-FE, base = variable

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[64] Simm, C., Page, R., & Miller, L. (2007). *Reasons for Early Leaving from FE and Work-Based Learning Courses.* London: DfES.

The findings suggest that there is also a relationship between use of formal and informal IAG services and type and location of study. Approximately two-thirds of respondents in Sixth Form College (69.3%) and School Sixth Form (63.9%) accessed a range of help and support with their decision making compared with just over half who went on to study in a GFE college (52.0%) and a fifth who went on to study with a private provider (19.0%). Full-time on-campus learners were more likely to access both professional and informal support (61.9%) than all other learners (35.3%). However, the link between mode and location of study and service use is likely to be a reflection of the fact that part-time learners are, on the whole, older and in some form of employment – two groups that are already known to access informal rather than formal sources of support.

Finally, respondents planning to progress into further education or a new job after finishing their existing course were significantly more likely to access professional and informal support on entry to the FE and Skills sector than those who plan to remain with their current employer. Three-fifths (59.2%) of those planning to progress in education and over half (53.8%) of those hoping to secure a new job sought IAG compared with just one in three (29.6%) of those who plan to stay in their current role.

The reasons why some learner groups are less likely, and others more likely, to seek help and support are considered below, along with the relative influence the respective sources of IAG have on individuals and the decisions they take. We first consider the extent and nature of professional IAG service usage, followed by an exploration of the reasons for non-use. We conclude this section of the report by examining the use of informal sources of help and support.

Use of professional IAG services

Over half (57.6%) of learners surveyed report that they had received help and support from at least one professional careers service when making their decision to study in the FE and Skills. Almost two-fifths (37.8%) of all respondents indicated that they had accessed help through a school, college or university careers service and just under a third (31.3%) accessed support from Connexions. Although more than a third (37.3%) of respondents were known to be eligible for support from Next Step[65], only a tiny minority (2.2%) of all respondents reported that they accessed this service (see Figure 5).

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[65] A total of 449 respondents were known to be aged 19 or over; a further 27 respondents did not specify their age. The 27 who accessed Next Step represents 2.2% of all respondents and 6.0% of those known to be eligible.
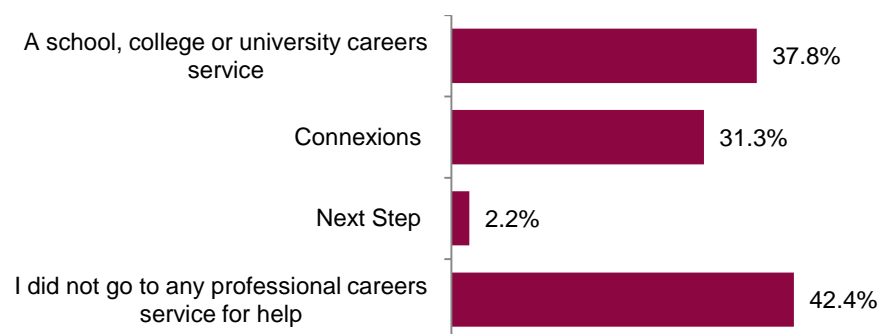
Figure 5: Which types of help and support learners accessed to make decisions about studying in FE, base = 1,221 – multiple responses possible

Learners accessed professional services for a variety of reasons. Figure 6 demonstrates that survey respondents typically accessed professional IAG in order to explore learning and work options. The vast majority of respondents who accessed IAG through Connexions and/or a school, college or university careers service received support on a face-to-face basis (82.4% and 65.3% respectively). Although a substantial proportion of Next Step users also explored their learning and work options face-to-face, a substantial minority (33.3%) accessed this type of support by telephone.
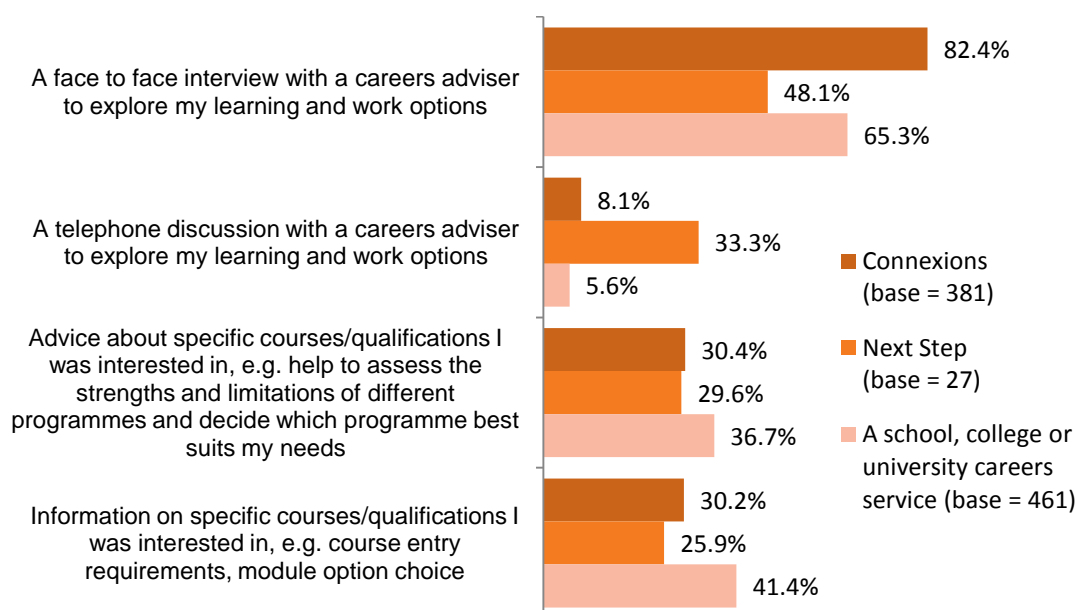
Figure 6: Type of support learner received from the professional careers service, base = variable – mulitple responses possible

The majority of respondents who accessed professional guidance report that the adviser produced a written record of their discussion for them to take away and use to inform their decisions. As a substantial minority of service users only sought advice or information about specific courses/qualifications, a written record may not have been appropriate in many instances.
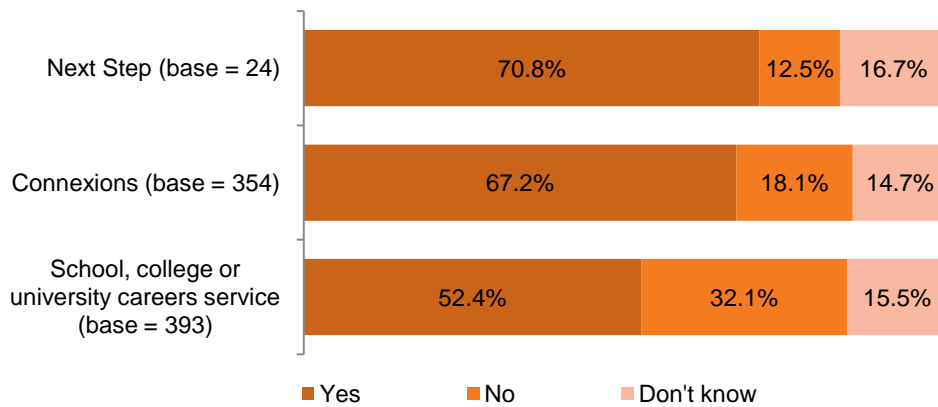
Figure 7: Whether or not the adviser wrote down what was discussed in a document for the learner to take away (e.g. in an action plan or a personal development plan) base = variable

On average, learners who accessed an institution-based careers service or Connexions for pre-entry IAG found it 'useful', whereas the small proportion of adults who had used Next Step were indifferent about the service they received (Figure 8).
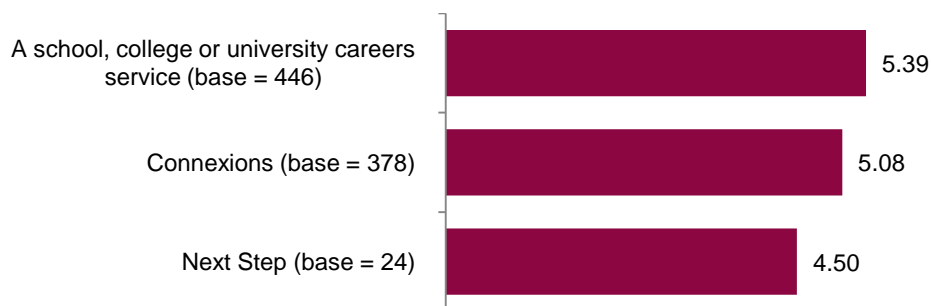
Figure 8: Leaner perceptions of the usefulness of pre-entry professional IAG. Services rated on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 = not useful at all, and 7 = very useful, base = variable

The focus groups provide some insights into what learners regard as the key strengths of institution-based IAG. These insights also offer an indication as to the reasons why they perceive it to be useful. Learners particularly value advisers' understanding of the wider FE and Skills system as well as their in-depth knowledge of both the range and content of courses available. The volume of information available to learners is regarded as a key limitation of current provision. Therefore, the role that tutors and advisers fulfil in supporting learners to sift and interpret this information is key.

Reasons for non-use of professional IAG

In order to further understand the reasons why some individuals sought support with decisions about learning and work, it is helpful to understand the reasons why others did not. A small minority (7.6%) of survey respondents[66] report that they did not access any form of pre-entry IAG, formal or informal. However, the figure for non-use rises to just over two-fifths (42.4%) of

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[66] 45.6 per cent of non-users are aged 16-18. However, they represent only 5.5 per cent of all 16-18 year olds in the sample; older learners are significantly less likely to make use of support services than younger learners overall.

respondents when asked specifically in relation to professional IAG services. The findings demonstrate that 'lack of awareness' and 'dissatisfaction with service provision' accounts for only a small proportion of non-use; lack of perceived need is the over-riding factor. Figure 9 illustrates that almost half (47.5%) of respondents who had not accessed professional IAG indicate that despite being aware of the service, they did not believe they needed their help; a further 15.3 per cent expressed a preference for other forms of support.

Bar chart:
- I was aware of the services but did not believe that I needed their help: 47.5%
- I was not aware of the services: 16.8%
- I preferred to use other sources of help: 15.3%
- I had used these services in the past and did not find them to be useful: 8.7%
- I did not know how to access these services: 6.2%
- Other reason: 5.6%
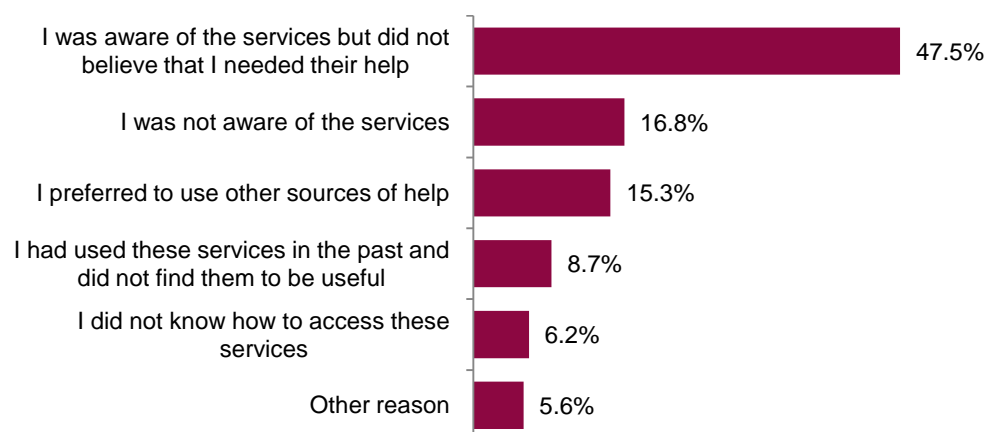
Figure 9: The main reason why learners did not use a professional careers service to help them make decisions about studying in the FE and Skills sector, base = 518

Age

We noted above that age was a key determinant of service use and that learners over the age of 24 had a greater propensity to seek support from their informal networks rather than professional IAG services. Further analysis reveals that a quarter of respondents that did not access professional IAG were aged 25 and over. This equates to over three-quarters (78.4%) of respondents in that age group compared with just over a third (36.4%) of those aged 16-24.

> *"The older you get the more life takes over. You have to balance it. You can't focus on what you really do want to do. You are restricted; you can't afford to take chances."*

<div align="right">

Focus group participant

</div>

Many mature learners have family and other responsibilities. For this group of learners, the potential impact that their decision to return to learning could have on their family was a primary concern and was the overriding factor in the decision-making process. Studying, even part-time, has emotional, financial and logistical implications for family life and interviewees stressed how important it was for them to have the support of their immediate and extended family. As a result, they report that discussing their decision with those directly affected by it was more critical than discussing it with a careers adviser, at least initially.

> *"My family were very helpful because it's a big decision for us all. When you're an older student you've got a lot of*

commitments. You won't be supported by your mum and dad - you're the one supporting others."

<div align="right">Learner interviewee</div>

"My family were very important…I'm doing some of the course in the evenings so with two children at school I needed their support in doing the school run and looking after them while I was in class."

<div align="right">Learner interviewee</div>

In a minority of cases, mature learners perceived that professional IAG services are predominantly aimed at young people and were consequently discouraged from obtaining professional advice:

"When you've worked for so long and you need their help I can imagine you're tended to be looked down upon. I wouldn't be comfortable going in and talking to them about restarting my career."

<div align="right">Learner interviewee</div>

"Go to a college [for IAG]*? I would feel out of place, even at my age in my late twenties. It's a perception; I don't feel I would belong there. A college would be off-putting."*

<div align="right">Focus group participant</div>

In addition, as noted earlier and elsewhere, older learners are more likely to have access to broader and more extensive networks made up of individuals who can provide an informed view on potential learning and career options in a specific field, as the following respondents illustrate:

"I've a friend who works in HR so I went to them for help. I knew what I wanted to do but didn't know who the best providers were, or what to judge them on. In the end I followed her advice."

<div align="right">Learner interviewee</div>

"My family are involved in the health sector for the elderly so they helped me in deciding what courses I needed to do."

<div align="right">Learner interviewee</div>

In contrast, younger interviewees were more open to the idea of professional advice, owing to a stronger awareness of the services available and a perceived lack of 'trusted' informal networks with whom to discuss their options. Maintaining 'service awareness' among young people is an important consideration going forward, as the widely recognised brand of 'Connexions' disappears and the NCS is introduced.

One younger learner indicated that they did not want to discuss their future career path with their parent, a notion shared by a mature learner reflecting on their experience with their own child:

> *"I've a very opinionated 14 year old who won't want to listen to me but I expect would listen to an adult who can offer confidential advice but who's not her parent."*

<div align="right">Learner interviewee</div>

This reluctance to seek parental advice was also reflected in the focus group with vocational learners. Although respondents recognise that there was some value in speaking to their parents, they also report that their advice could be influenced by their own views and experiences which could, in turn, be relatively narrow and/or potentially outdated. In addition, learners from disadvantaged groups may be first generation entrants into the further (or higher) education sector and their parents may not, therefore, have direct experience to draw on in order to advise their offspring.

> *"It's good to speak to your parents but they are a bit biased."*

<div align="right">Focus group participant</div>

Finally, some young learners reported that they had not wanted to be influenced by their friends' decisions and that this provided the impetus to seek independent, professional advice:

> *"I went to Connexions as I was worried that I would be convinced by my friends to do the same course as them. I wanted an independent view of what and where I could go."*

<div align="right">Learner interviewee</div>

Nevertheless, one focus group participant gave the same rationale for not seeking professional (or any other form of) IAG:

> *"I'm the type of person who likes to do my own thing. If my friends are doing one thing, I'll do something else. I know my own mind and I don't like to speak to anyone else when I'm making decisions."*

<div align="right">Focus group participant</div>

Employment status

The connection between employment status and pre-entry IAG service use is perhaps unsurprising; many of those in full-time work who intend to return to their current position with their existing employer are likely to be undertaking qualifications or training designed to achieve organisational skills objectives or address individual skills needs identified during appraisals. In instances such as these, the requirement to undertake learning could be perceived to negate the need for pre-entry IAG on the part of the individual.

"The course was suggested to me by my manager during my appraisal. I was struggling with the financial side; as I had recently been given more duties at work, and he thought this would help."

<div align="right">Learner interviewee</div>

Those seeking to consolidate or develop their career by undertaking further qualifications after a number of years in their chosen field reported that they were able to draw upon their own experience in order to decide which courses were most appropriate for them. These learners were confident in their own abilities to identify and select appropriate programmes without the need for professional help:

"I feel very informed about what's available to me having worked in the industry for over 20 years, so I don't see the need [for professional IAG]*."*

<div align="right">Learner interviewee</div>

"My decision to study was pre-empted by the recession. I'm unsure what the future holds for me so I did the course to back up my CV. My employer has been very supportive."

<div align="right">Learner interviewee</div>

However, further exploration during the learner interviews revealed that some work-based learners would have valued professional IAG but that lack of time to seek help was a factor, particularly for those working full-time. This issue could be partly resolved as the new NCS is rolled out, offering adults flexible online and telephone support in addition to more time consuming face-to-face interventions.

"I've got two kids in school and I work full time. It would have been nice [to have a face-to-face meeting] *but I don't like the idea of taking a day's holiday for it; evenings would be difficult too"*

<div align="right">Learner interviewee</div>

Perhaps more fundamental are the doubts expressed by other interviewees about the extent to which an adviser could have enough contextual understanding of the individual's circumstances to provide the right options for them:

"I can see how an adviser could help with selecting where to go, but will they know whether the course covers what I need for work better than me or my line manager? I can't see it."

<div align="right">Learner interviewee</div>

This signals that there may be a lack of understanding among some learner groups about the nature of professional IAG and the ways in which it can support people in work seeking to further develop their career, both now and in the future.

We noted above the correlation between age, employment status and mode of study and the likelihood that an individual had accessed pre-entry IAG. However, it is important to recognise that part-time learners are highly diverse and study in a number of ways including block/day release and by distance/e-learning. Further analysis reveals that although part-time learners overall were less likely to access professional IAG, either independently or in conjunction with informal support, than full-time learners, those who study at a distance were the least likely of all to seek formal support. Just over a quarter (26.7%) of distance/e-learning learners accessed professional IAG compared with approximately two-fifths of those on block release (40.5%) or studying part-time on campus (37.2%).

Mode of study	Percentage
Full-time on campus/site (base = 893)	65.3%
Day/block release from work (base = 37)	40.5%
Part-time on campus/site (base = 250)	37.2%
Distance learning/e-learning (base = 30)	26.7%
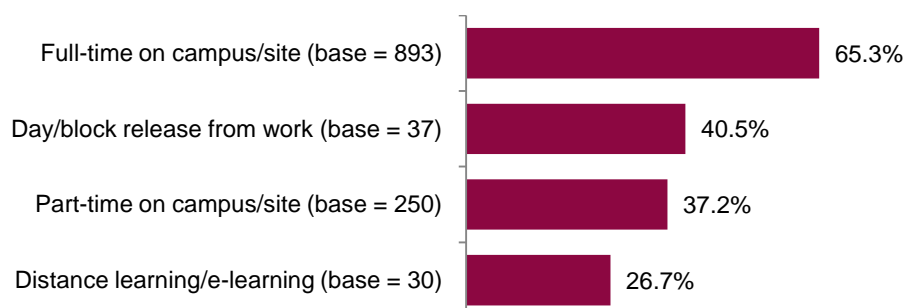
Figure 10: Use of professional IAG by mode of study, base = variable

The low take-up of formal IAG amongst work-based learners and other groups that study at a distance has been noted elsewhere[67] and attributed, at least in part, to a lack of awareness of service provision and its benefits. However, gaps in provision for those studying in specialist vocational areas are also widely reported and this, coupled with issues of access for non-campus based learners, may also be a contributing factor. [68] Finally, our interviews with stakeholders also suggest that work-based learners may not be encouraged to seek independent advice, particularly by their employer, as the employer has a vested interest in retaining them within their organisation.

> *"You can see how controversial it would be, divisive, and unpopular with employers, that people they have taken on or are training up are actually being given good advice as to what they should do the minute they finish their apprenticeship."*

Stakeholder

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[67] Bowes, L. (2008) *Mapping IAG & Learner Support for Vocational & Work-based Learners in Birmingham, the Black Country & Solihull,* The Birmingham, Black Country and Solihull (BBCS) Lifelong Learning Network.
[68] *ibid.*

In summary, many learners who do not access professional IAG prior to entering the FE and Skills system prefer to draw on their own experience and the experience of their trusted informal networks when making their decisions. The extent, role and influence of these informal sources of IAG are considered in more detail below.

Use of informal sources of help and support

Existing evidence suggests that informal IAG is commonplace and highly influential amongst learners in the FE and Skills sector[69]. Our findings provide further evidence of this trend as well as some insights into the reasons why.

We noted earlier that nine out of ten survey respondents (89.5%) sought informal help and support, and this came from up to 10 different sources. However, while younger learners were more likely to combine formal and informal IAG, learners over the age of 25 were more likely to rely solely on this form of support.

Further analysis reveals the range of sources of informal help and support that entrants to the FE and Skills system drew upon in order to make their decisions. Figure 11 demonstrates that friends and family were the most common source of informal help, with over three-fifths of respondents indicating that they consulted with them during the decision-making process. Just under half (49.1%) of respondents sought the advice of a tutor or teacher. Although a minority of respondents also sought help from other trusted professionals (such as Youth Workers, Jobcentre Plus Advisers, Social Workers, Recruitment Consultants, learndirect, Probation Officers, unionlearn[70] and, most notably, employers) the other key forms of informal support used were predominantly information sources.

Friends/family — 63.8%
A tutor or teacher — 49.1%
Internet — 42.7%
Learning provider prospectus — 16.3%
Learning provider open day — 15.6%
Careers library at school/college/university — 13.8%
Employer — 7.6%
Other — 8.7%
I did not use any other sources of help and support — 10.5%
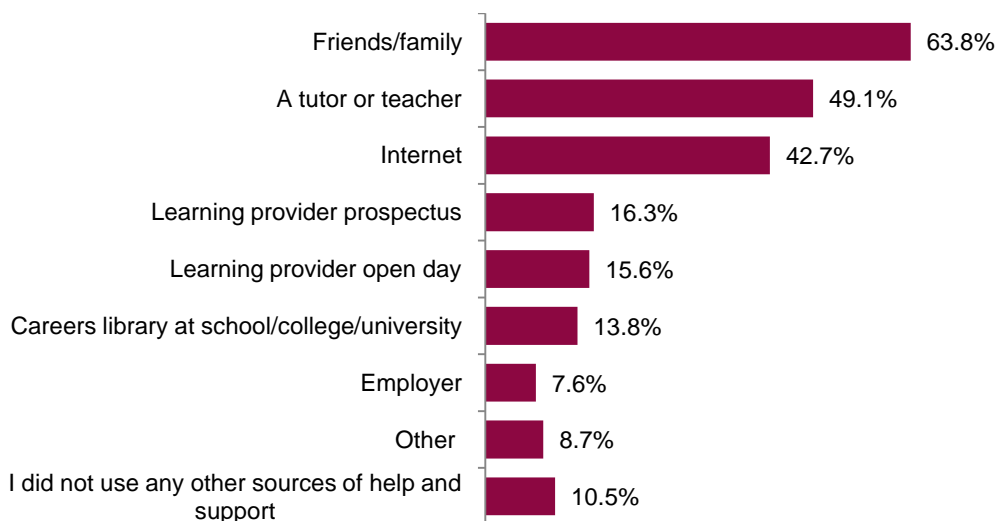
Figure 11: Sources of informal IAG access to inform decision to go into FE, base = 1,223

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[69] Taylor, J., Vasickova, D., Byrom, A. & Dickson, J. *(2005) Demand for, and perceptions of information, advice and guidance*, London: MORI and The Guidance Council.
[70] These categories have been combined under other because the number of respondents selecting each option was too small to facilitate analysis at this level. Those who have stated more than one "other" category appear in the percentages only once.

The interviews and focus groups with learners revealed that many learners were confident in their ability to find and make sense of the information that is available, particularly if they already have a clear sense of what and/or where they wanted to study.

> *'I'm quite capable of looking online for all the information available to me. So I looked if the local college did the course. Once it did then it was no brainer for me.'*

<div align="right">Learner interviewee</div>

This group of learners would typically utilise more than one information source in order to build up an understanding of their learning options. The decision-making process can, therefore, involve the learner reading a college prospectus, enquiring directly about a particular course, attending an open day, and speaking with a tutor:

> *"I went on the website to look up health and social care courses. There was a link to information about an open day. I came to that and got a chance to speak to a tutor who helped me decide whether the course was right for me"*

<div align="right">Focus group participant</div>

In order to understand the role and influence that informal help and support has in the decision-making process relative to professional IAG, survey respondents were asked to rate how influential each type of support used had been. It is interesting to note that all forms of informal support were perceived to be more influential than sources of professional IAG, but also that friends and family as well as employers were the most influential (see Figure 12).

Employer (base = 93)	5.55
Friends and family (base = 765)	5.48
Information sources such as careers library at school/college/university, learning provider prospectus or open day and the internet (base = 668)	5.31
Other professional, such as your probation officer, social worker or youth worker (base = 45)	4.89
Non-careers professional working in the field of learning and skills, such as a tutor, teacher, union learning representative, Jobcentre Plus adviser, or recruitment consultant (base = 606)	4.70
Professional career service, such as Next Step or a service located within a college or university (base = 641)	4.28

Figure 12: How influential the learner found the following sources of help when making decisions about their chosen course: on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 = no influence at all, and 7 = very influential, base = variable

According to the learners who took part in the focus groups, friends and family have their best interests at heart and, as a result, their advice is regarded as trustworthy. It is commonplace for learners to aspire to enter the same profession as a member of their family or network of close friends. The insights they give, based on their knowledge and experience of the job and/or industry, are perceived to be a further strength by learners. Furthermore, friends and family can offer learners the practical and emotional support they need, both at the point of entry into the FE and Skills system and throughout their programme of study. The key strengths of this source of help and support identified by learners give some insights into the reasons why they are so influential.

Although employers, friends and family exert the most influence over learners' pre-entry decisions, it interesting to note that these sources were perceived to be less useful than other forms of support, including open days and prospectuses produced by learning providers and information available online (Figure 13). In addition to the strengths, learners perceive that there are a number of inherent weaknesses in the support their family and friends provide. These include the lack of insight friends and family can typically provide into the range of options available and the implications for future progression; lack of awareness and understanding of current qualifications, including higher education; the lack of impartiality and potential bias in their views; and the risk that their knowledge and/or experience is outdated and no longer accurate. Learners' perceptions of the limitations of this source of help could help to explain why learners regard this type of support as less useful than other forms of IAG.

Source	Rating
Learning provider open day (base = 186)	6.03
Learning provider prospectus (base = 193)	5.88
Internet (base = 507)	5.79
Friends/family (base = 773)	5.77
A tutor or teacher (base = 597)	5.76
Employer (base = 91)	5.70
Careers library at school/college/university (base = 167)	5.43
Other (base = 123)	5.05
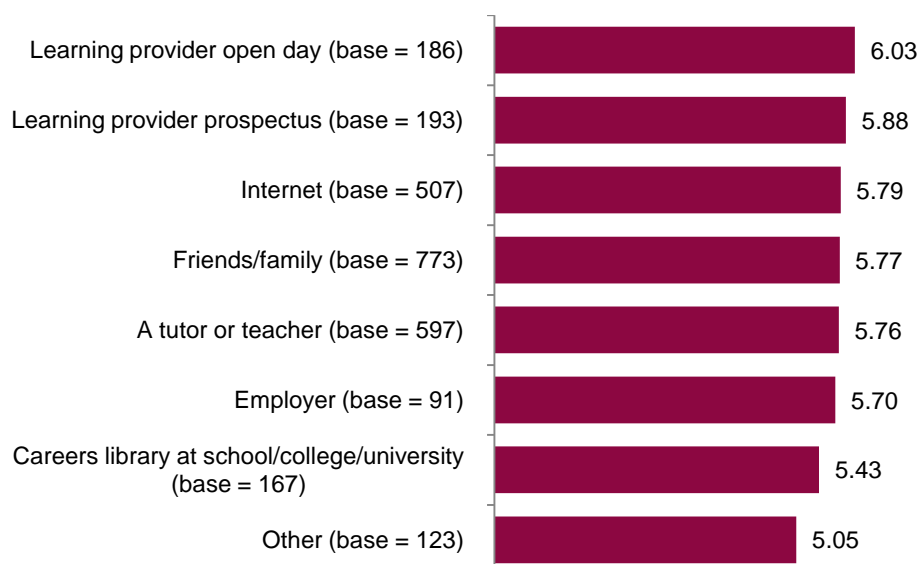
Figure 13: How useful the learner found the following sources of help when making the decision about studying in FE: on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 = not useful at all, and 7 = very useful, base = variable

The findings suggest that potential entrants engage with professional guidance services in order to explore their learning and work options. This intervention will typically take place at a relatively early stage in the decision-making process, helping the individual to focus on a particular subject area or field of interest which they then investigate in more depth. During subsequent stages in the process, individuals will typically draw on informal sources of support to help them refine their choices and make a final decision.

> *"Speaking with an adviser was very valuable as it highlighted all the available options to me, but ultimately I needed to discuss this with my family as they would be the most affected."*

<div align="right">Learner interviewee</div>

> *"I wanted to go to university so it's a big time commitment as well as a financial one, so getting professional advice seemed the most logical step. I had to get approval from my employer in order to reduce my hours, so in a sense they were the most influential, otherwise I might not have bothered with my access course."*

<div align="right">Learner interviewee</div>

It could be inferred that the closer the individual gets to their final decision, the more influential the support they access is perceived to be. In addition, those individuals offering informal support, such as friends, family, employers and in some instances teachers and tutors, often know the potential learner well and have a good understanding of their personal and/or professional needs and circumstances. This places them at an advantage over independent guidance professionals and could accord them greater credibility in the eyes of the decision-maker, even though their views and opinions are often partial and potentially flawed.

Summary

The learner population in the FE and Skills sector is highly diverse and, as a result, exhibit a complex array of learning and support needs. Pre-entry CLIAG is widely regarded as fulfilling an important role in supporting learners to address these needs and overcome barriers to access. Although current provision in the FE and Skills sector is perceived to be variable, it is also recognised for the positive impact it can have on decision-making and learner choice when delivered well and at the appropriate time.

The majority of learners do access pre-entry CLIAG when considering the available range of courses and potential progression routes. Age, employment status and existing qualification level are the most significant determinants of the extent and type of service used. Young people are most likely to access professional IAG, often in conjunction with informal help and support; adults are more likely to draw on their own networks or to make decisions without seeking any form of IAG at all. Overall, users of professional services for young people regard them as useful; adult service users are more indifferent.

Informal sources of IAG have a significant influence over learners of all ages. Some members of a learner's personal and professional networks bring valuable insights to the decision-making process, but it is important to recognise that other informal sources will be partial and inaccurate and an over-reliance on them could result in less-informed choices. Professional IAG fulfils a vital role, particularly for young people and some adults who may not have access to more informed networks, helping to provide a balance for the views and opinions of trusted peers, plug the gaps in their knowledge and understanding and challenge their thinking. It is, therefore, somewhat of a paradox that much of the provision in place until recently to fulfil this crucial function is now threatened as the NCS is rolled out.

Finally, the majority of non-use of professional IAG services results from a lack of perceived need. Although further research is required to explore whether learner confidence in their abilities to make effective decisions is justified, it is likely, particularly in the context of current reforms to career guidance, that work is needed to promote the existence of NCS and the wider 'career support market' and to demonstrate the value of impartial IAG to adults as well as young people.

4 | Service delivery

National policy does not specify the way in which professional CLIAG should be delivered in the FE and Skills sector and, as a result, there is a high degree of variability in both formal and informal provision for learners. This chapter explores how the range of services is currently delivered for learners 'pre-entry', 'on programme' and 'on exit' from the FE and Skills system. Perceptions of current provision, including its strengths and limitations, are explored along with learner preferences for future provision.

Current delivery mechanisms

Pre-entry support

We noted previously that pre-entry CLIAG can fulfil an important role in providing potential entrants to the FE and Skills system with the help and support they need to overcome barriers to learning and succeed in their chosen programme of study. The extent and nature of the support available to learners currently varies according to age and personal circumstances; these factors also have an important influence on take-up of formal and/or informal sources of help. As we outline below, pre-entry CLIAG is delivered in a variety of ways, but face-to-face interaction is a core element, particularly in provision for young people.

IAG for young people

Prior to the reforms, where high quality provision existed, young people in schools benefited from a programme of careers education and guidance (CEG) which complied with statutory guidance. Provision was designed to help them develop effective decision-making and career-management skills as well as explore potential career options. Programmes of CEG may have involved a range of activities including work experience, employer talks, college visits and use of diagnostic tools, as well as group and/or one-to-one sessions with a Connexions Personal Adviser or School Careers Adviser (e.g. teacher or co-ordinator). Although information and communication technology (ICT) was widely used to support delivery, sessions were almost always facilitated by a member of staff who may or may not have had a career guidance-related qualification. This structured programme of CEG, coupled with additional support available outside the formal school environment through Connexions and individual learning providers, ensured that learners up to the age of 19 had the opportunity to speak to a professional guidance practitioner (either face-to-face or by telephone) and to access information to help them make learning and career decisions.

We noted earlier, however, that not all learners take up the opportunity of professional IAG, for a variety of reasons. Furthermore, there is evidence from Ofsted to suggest that there was considerable variation in the advice and guidance available and, in particular, a failure to meet the needs of some of the most vulnerable young people. In addition, when career education is provided by the schools themselves, the quality varies considerably. Not all

staff responsible for teaching careers education have enough knowledge or experience to fulfil the role effectively and *"the provision of information, advice and guidance about the options available to students at the age of 16* [is] *not always sufficiently impartial"*[71]*.* There are concerns within the guidance sector that this situation is unlikely to improve as the reforms are fully implemented and as responsibility for securing access to impartial IAG for young people is devolved to schools, including those that have a vested interest in pupils progressing into their own Sixth Forms rather than to a local college or training provider.

IAG for adults

Learners over the age of 19 can access professional IAG through Next Step or a private IAG service. These providers offer a range of information resources as well as advice and in-depth guidance interventions face-to-face or by telephone. Adults also have access to a wide range of other services characterised in existing research as a 'careers support market', much of which is ICT-enabled.[72] Learners in work may also access IAG from their employer or unionlearn. Finally, FE and Skills providers also offer a variety of pre-entry support to potential learners, including careers fairs, course open days, and advice and guidance interviews, in addition to online information and prospectuses.

As we noted in the previous chapter, although there are significant differences in the usage patterns of different learner groups, the majority, who are considering entry into the FE and Skills sector, will access at least one of these sources of IAG in order to inform their decision.

On-programme

Once learners enter the FE and Skills system, demand for professional IAG services declines substantially. The survey findings indicate that learners who do access IAG are, perhaps unsurprisingly, most likely to seek help from an institution-based service. However, only a fifth (21.9%) of survey respondents reported that they accessed this service while on programme. Small minorities have turned to external provision such as Connexions (13.2%) and Next Step (1.3%).[73]

The likelihood that a learner will access any form of help and support while on programme appears to be, at least in part, determined by previous use. Almost nine out of ten respondents (87.9%) who accessed formal and informal IAG pre-entry also accessed support while on programme; this is in contrast to half of those who did not access any form of pre-entry support (49.4%). The majority (51.5%) of learners who accessed pre-entry professional IAG only had not accessed IAG during their studies. This finding must be treated with caution because it is based on a relatively small number of respondents. However, at first glance, it appears to be at odds with the initial hypothesis that there is a link between current and likely future use.

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[71] Ofsted (2010) *Moving through the system – information, advice and guidance.* Manchester: Ofsted.

[72] UKCES (2011) *Helping individuals succeed: Transforming career guidance.* London: UKCES.

[73] Percentages calculated from a base of 1,152 responses.

Further investigation is required to establish whether this is indicative of a wider trend and, if so, the reasons why there is low take up amongst these learners. Finally, the survey suggests that learners who only accessed informal support pre-entry continued to rely solely on this type of support during their studies (Figure 14).

Both professional and informal IAG pre-FE (base = 622): 33.9% | 8.2% | 45.8% | 12.1%

Only professional IAG pre-FE (base = 33): 12.1% | 9.1% | 27.3% | 51.5%

Only informal IAG pre-FE (base = 402): 13.9% | 3.2% | 56.7% | 26.1%

Neither professional nor informal IAG pre-FE (base = 83): 2.4% | 6.0% | 42.2% | 49.4%

■ Both professional and informal IAG during FE
■ Only professional IAG during FE
■ Only informal IAG during FE
■ Neither professional nor informal IAG during FE

Figure 14: What type of support the learner received before entering FE split by what type of support they have received whilst in FE, base = variable

Figure 15 demonstrates that learners who accessed support while on programme were most likely to be seeking help with their current course or qualification (71.4%). Just 14 per cent of those who accessed support needed help to change course, suggesting that the majority of learners did make the right choices pre-entry. Further analysis reveals that a high proportion of learners (80.2%) who sought advice to change course, had previously accessed professional IAG. This suggests that although the learners did not make the right choice based on the IAG they received, they continue to recognise the value of consulting with a professional.

The findings also demonstrate that a substantial proportion of learners begin thinking about potential progression routes into further study or employment before they reach the end of their programme. Just over half (52.1%) of survey respondents sought help with future study and almost two-fifths (38.4%) with jobs/careers during their course.
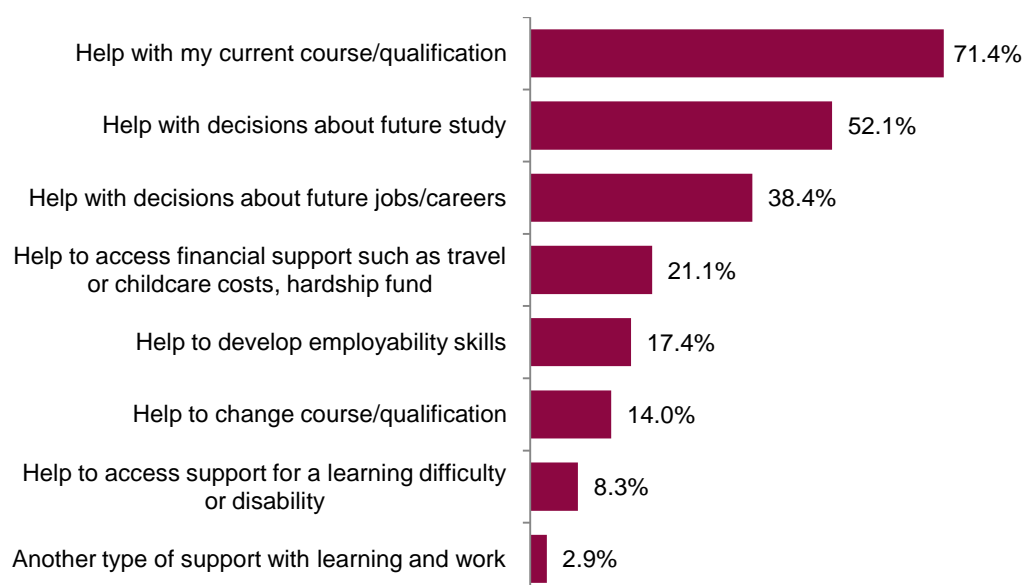
Figure 15: Type of support received whilst in FE, base = 907 – multiple responses possible

Learners who accessed formal on-programme support regarded it as useful (Figure 16). It is interesting to note that, on average, learners rated support at this stage in their learner journey as more useful than pre-entry support. This suggests that the nature and/or the timing of the intervention may influence learner perceptions of the usefulness of professional support.
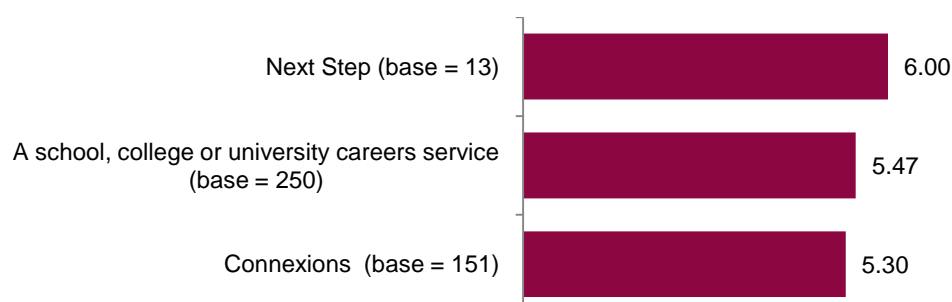
Figure 16: How useful the learner found the following sources of help whilst studying in FE: on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 = not useful at all, and 7 = very useful, base = variable

Partnership working

The way in which careers and other related student services are delivered to learners while on programme varies between providers, but the evidence suggests that it is common for careers advisers employed by the learning provider to work with staff from external organisations in a partnership model. The majority of colleges consulted have developed strong relationships with Connexions and Next Step providers and, prior to the reforms, arrangements were in place to enable advisers from these organisations to meet face-to-face with learners on college premises on set days of the week. Although learners may not be able to differentiate between the services provided by their institution and those delivered by an external provider, collaborating in this way is largely regarded as beneficial for both parties; it enables colleges to increase their capacity to offer professional IAG to learners and allows advisers to gain access to some learner groups who may otherwise be difficult to reach.

Nevertheless, the additional resource provided by external IAG organisations, particularly for 16 to 18 year olds, has been substantially reduced and, in some cases, has disappeared completely as a result of budget cuts and the shift in responsibility for CLIAG from local authorities to schools. In addition, the differing eligibility criteria imposed on advisers employed by different organisations presents some logistical challenges. In response, one college reported that they have introduced a booking-in system: Learners requiring help sign up for an appointment and an adviser is then allocated according to their availability and contractual restrictions. Research is also currently being undertaken to explore further possibilities for co-location of services and, in particular, the potential for economies of scale. However, while this could present a cost-effective solution to some of the challenges facing IAG providers at present, it is important to recognise that some potential service-users may be deterred from accessing provision located within a formal educational setting like a college, as we noted above.

Learner support

In most colleges, careers advisers work alongside other support staff in student services to provide an integrated service on a range of issues, including financial hardship, housing, and English language. At a national level, IAG will be increasingly delivered by telephone and via web-based services. However, many of the stakeholders consulted report that it is crucial to be able to offer learners with multiple needs *face-to-face* IAG to help them address the issues that act as barriers to learning effectively:

> *"Yesterday we had a young person come in...*[his] *English was non-existent. I had to get one of my finance officers to come and talk to him, who was Italian, who had a smattering of Spanish. Between us we managed to find out he had a housing problem...that had to be sorted out first and foremost... Then I said to him, 'Once the housing is sorted out, we will see you again for a guidance interview,' because I think he's got some qualifications from abroad that we could take into consideration... that's a typical kind of query we get to deal with...It's not a chat over the phone that's going to sort those out."*

<div align="right">

IAG Practitioner

</div>

Learners also expressed a preference for face-to-face guidance when dealing with a complex set of issues, but recognise the benefits of IAG delivered through a range of different media. We return to consider the issue of mode of delivery later in this chapter.

The evidence also suggests that employers, work colleagues, assessors and other training provider staff fulfil a crucial role in relation to learner support for work-based learners. Assessors are often the first point of contact for work-based learners with queries regarding the programme content or delivery, and learners are inclined to take up any issues with their programme directly with the learning provider. Employers and work colleagues, on the other hand, are more likely to offer support with the practical or logistical challenges associated with combining work and study:

> *Employer has been helpful. I've been doing half days, it does drag the diploma out longer, but we needed to reach a compromise and* [the employer] *is fine as long as you are doing your hours.*

<div align="right">Focus group participant</div>

> *You need to get help from other members of staff, to cover your shift for example.*

<div align="right">Focus group participant</div>

Careers education

Stakeholders reported that an increasing number of GFE colleges are integrating career learning into the curriculum to ensure that learners are focused on progression and develop the skills they need to make effective decisions, secure sustainable employment, and manage their career successfully. Again, the way in which career learning is delivered varies between providers, ranging from one-off events such as CV-building workshops and interview skills, through work placements, to full credit-bearing modules.

One provider consulted, that recently achieved the 'Investor in Careers' kite mark, has developed a tutorial framework designed to contribute to the achievement of learning outcomes for careers education. The assessment process for 'Investor in Careers' revealed that careers education was already embedded in many aspects of the curriculum:

> *"We know that within the tutor groups that careers education is embedded...and when we did the Investor in Careers we saw how much was embedded, which was quite encouraging. A lot of the students didn't realise that they were doing careers as such, they knew they'd got to do their CV and they'd got to do it by a certain time; they'd got to do some research about jobs and what kinds of jobs would suit them, but they didn't realise it was all part of careers and it was all preparing them for what they might do later on."*

<div align="right">Provider</div>

The key challenge was to articulate to tutors how they were contributing to career learning outcomes and to help tutors to make these elements more explicit in their schemes of work for tutorials. Although lecturing staff received training, the tutorial framework is being implemented by dedicated tutors. The appointment of dedicated lead tutors and buy-in at all levels of the institution, including the Principal, are regarded as critical to full integration and the success of the framework which will be accredited for the first time this academic year. However, sustaining and further developing curriculum-based activities presents a key challenge for providers moving forward, as the full impact is felt of the reduction in the number of guided learning hours[74] for enrichment activities.

On exit

IAG on exit from the FE and Skills sector fulfils an equally important role, helping to ensure that learners are aware of the progression routes available to them and are equipped with the skills they need to make a successful transition to their chosen outcome. The majority (66.4%) of survey respondents reported that they intend to progress, or have already progressed, into higher level learning on completion of their programme in the FE and Skills sector. A further 15.1 per cent intend to find a new job, compared with 5.8 per cent who plan to remain with their current employer. Perhaps most notable is the one in ten respondents (9.7%) who are not sure what they want to do once they have completed their current course (Figure 17).
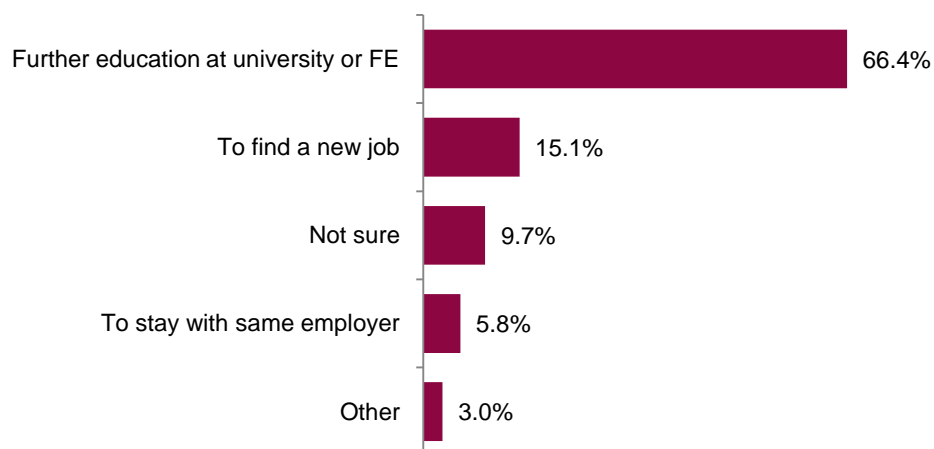
Figure 17: What the learner plans to do once they have completed their current course/qualification, or what they have done if already completed, base = 1,228

Respondents were subsequently asked to state whether or not they planned to seek IAG from a professional careers service when making the decision about future learning and work options (or whether they had accessed professional support if they had already completed their course/qualification). Two-fifths (40.5%) of respondents overall reported that they will seek professional IAG; just over a third (34.9%) will not and the remainder (24.6%) are undecided.

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[74] Provision for enrichment activities is being reduced from 114 to 30 guided learning hours

"I will most likely get some support at the end. There will be things you don't know about and expect I will need some help then."

Further analysis reveals that although a significant minority intend to use a professional careers service, a smaller proportion act on their intentions. Over two-fifths (43.1%) of learners who are currently studying in the FE and Skills sector plan to access professional IAG on exit. However, of those respondents who have completed a programme within the last 12 months, just a quarter (25.7%) accessed professional IAG services before progressing into their current outcome. Age is a key determinant of whether an individual will access professional IAG on exit from the sector. Figure 18 illustrates that similar proportions of learners of all ages who are either about to start or who are currently studying in the FE and Skills system intend to seek professional help on exit. However, data on those who have already left suggests that older learners are least likely to act on their intentions.
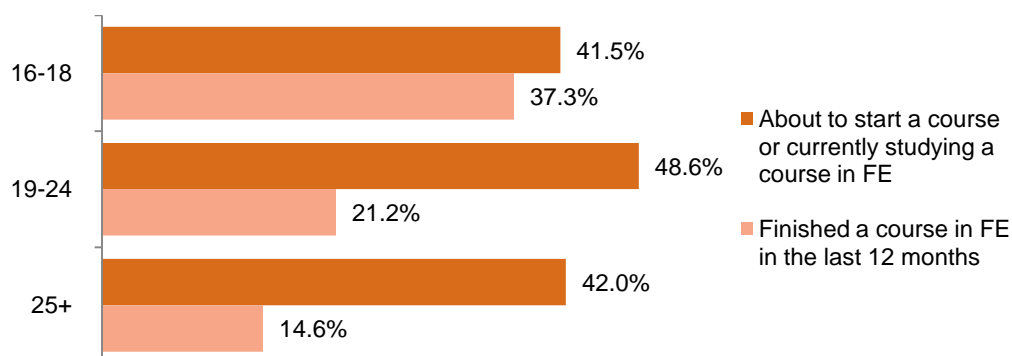
Figure 18: Proportion of learners who plan to use a professional careers service on completion of their course, or if they did access this if already completed, base = variable

The reasons why learners do not act on their intentions to seek professional IAG require further investigation. However, the continued role and influence of informal sources of help and support may provide a partial explanation. The majority of learners report that they will seek help from their friends, family or peers (65.8%) and/or the internet (56.4%). Substantial minorities also intend to draw on institutional information provision (38.6%) and/or the advice of non-careers professionals such as tutors (34.5%) (See Figure 19).

Category	Percentage
Friends, family or peers	65.8%
Internet	56.4%
Information services, such as careers library, prospectus or open day	38.6%
Non-careers professional working in the field of learning and skills	34.5%
Your employer	14.8%
Other professional, such as your Probation officer, Social worker or Youth worker	7.5%
Other source of help	1.7%
I won't go anywhere for help	6.9%

Figure 19: Further help and support learner plans to use after completing their course/qualification, or what they did use if already completed, base = 1,220

Those who plan to seek professional help with their decisions on exit from the FE and Skills sector report needing support with a wide range of issues. Approximately half of survey respondents would like an interview with a careers adviser to explore their learning and work options, information on specific jobs/careers, course specific information, and/or advice on potential progression routes. A further two-fifths (40.4%) will seek information on student finance (Figure 20).

Although a majority of respondents are interested in information on specific jobs or careers as well as career routes for people with their qualifications and skills, it is interesting to note that just one in ten respondents (11.2%) would like information on local labour market opportunities. The reasons why so many learners appear less concerned about the availability of actual job opportunities requires further investigation; a lack of awareness of intelligence of this nature could be one possible explanation, as recent research for the UK Commission for Employment and Skills concluded that the extent to which different IAG providers use and share LMI to support both the professional development of advisers and interaction with clients is variable and in need of improvement.[75]

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[75] UKCES (2011) *Helping Individuals Succeed: Transforming Career Guidance.* London: UKCES.

An interview with a careers adviser to explore my learning and work options	55.1%
Information on specific jobs/careers I am interested in	51.8%
Information on specific courses/qualifications I am interested in, such as entry requirements, module option choices, methods of assessment	50.8%
Advice on potential career routes for people with my qualifications and skills	50.4%
Advice on progression routes into further learning, including what and where to study	49.2%
Information on student finance	40.4%
Information on the local labour market opportunities	11.2%
Other type of help	1.8%

Figure 20: The type of help and support learners need to make effective decisions about your future learning and work options, base = 490

Mode of delivery

We noted previously that professional IAG services, including those provided by the NCS, will increasingly rely on technology during the client interface, and that opportunities for face-to-face interaction are likely to be more limited, particularly for young people. It is, therefore, interesting to note that when asked to indicate how they would prefer to receive help and support in the future, the majority of survey respondents (64%) stated face-to-face as their first preference. This is contrast with just 3 per cent who reported that their preferred mode of delivery was 'by telephone', although the proportion in favour of this method rises to just over a quarter when second preferences are taken into account. It is also notable that help and support by email appears to be more attractive to learners than IAG over the telephone, with a larger proportion of respondents ranking this as their first, second and third preference. Finally, the findings confirm that a significant minority of learners are happy to seek out information for themselves via the internet, with one in six (16%) learners stating that they would prefer to access information in this way in the first instance (Figure 21).

Preference	Face to face	Telephone	Email	Text messaging	Information available online	Social networking websites
1st preference (base = 1,226)	64%	3%	14%	2%	16%	1%
2nd preference (base = 1,153)	12%	26%	27%	6%	25%	4%
3rd preference (base = 1,119)	10%	18%	32%	9%	22%	9%
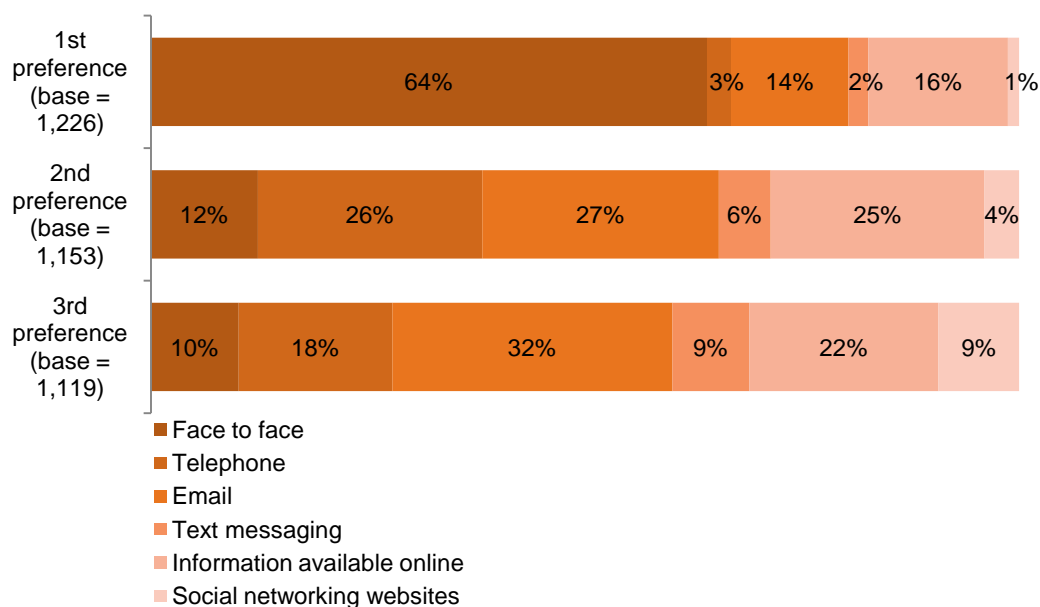
Figure 21: Learners preference for mode of IAG delivery, base = variable

The data was further analysed in order to identify whether certain sub-groups expressed preferences for particular types of service delivery. It is interesting to note that prior experience does not appear to influence learner preferences; learners who have received face-to-face IAG in the past are no more likely to select face-to-face delivery as their first choice than other learner groups. Similarly, there is no correlation between prior experience of telephone IAG and learner preferences for services delivered in this way. However, the evidence does suggest that there is a relationship between learner preferences for service delivery and factors including mode and place of study, existing qualification level and perceptions of the importance of career management skills and attitudes.

Learners studying at a Sixth Form College were more likely to state a first preference for face-to-face IAG (69.8%) than those studying in GFE colleges (66.5%), School Sixth Forms (58.7%), or private training providers (35.7%). Conversely, learners in full-time work were less likely to express a preference for face-to-face delivery (45.1%), and two-fifths (40.5%) of learners studying with a private training provider would prefer to access online support including websites or social networking. This is, perhaps, unsurprising, as many work-based learners and those who study part-time in addition to full-time work have limited opportunities to access IAG in person or over the telephone. Internet-based resources offer a more flexible and convenient option which can be accessed at a time and a place that is convenient for the learner, including during evenings and weekends. Indeed, the accessibility of online information, coupled with the opportunity for signposting to other sources of help such as events and open days, are perceived to be the key strengths of this form of support by learners of all types, and not just those in work. However, focus group participants also cautioned against an overreliance on this source of support, given there is no guarantee that the information is accurate and/or up to date, and there is still a considerable number of learners who are not able to access information in this way, such as those

who do not speak English as a first language and those without access to a computer and/or an internet connection.

In addition, those undertaking entry-level qualifications were more likely to prefer to access IAG through telephone, text and/or email than those undertaking qualifications at a higher level; just over two-fifths (41.0%) of entry level learners selected this method as their first choice, compared with 17.0 per cent of those studying at level 1 or above.

Finally, there is a correlation between the importance placed on the development of career management skills and the preferred mode of delivery. Learners who attached most importance to the development of career management skills were more likely to select face-to-face IAG as their first choice than those who attached less importance to the development of these skill areas.

Learner preferences for mode of service delivery were further explored during the interviews and focus groups. Our analysis confirms that, given the choice, the majority of learners would prefer to speak to an adviser face-to-face. However, they also recognise that the type of intervention required largely depends on the nature of their need at particular points on the learner journey and that, in some instances, information available online or advice over the telephone is sufficient. Furthermore, there is a significant body of evidence to suggest that not all learners need in-depth, face-to-face support and that the level and type of intervention should be determined by a learner's level of readiness for career decision-making, particularly in an environment where resources are limited. Sampson, *et al.* argue that learners who exhibit high levels of readiness should be referred to 'self-help' services, and those with moderate levels to 'brief staff-assisted' provision which could include advice by telephone or delivered through other electronic media such as text or email. Differentiating services in this way enables IAG providers to focus in-depth, resource-intensive (e.g. face-to-face) interventions on those with low readiness and who need it most.[76]

The stakeholders consulted also reported that different learners prefer to access help and support in different ways, depending on their circumstances, but that developing and delivering flexible services capable of meeting their needs through a variety of media presents a key challenge. There is evidence of innovative practice, including the use of ICT, but further developments in organisational infrastructure and staff training may be needed in some organisations before they can fully exploit the power of technology in the guidance setting:

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[76] Sampson, J.P. Jnr., Palmer, M., & Watts, A. G. (1999). *Who Needs Guidance?* CeGS Occasional Paper. Derby: Centre for Guidance Studies, University of Derby.

"What is it that they actually want? Do they want in depth one to one discussions with people? Do they actually want to be able to look things up on the web, because that's the way they do business? Those sorts of things, I think there's something there about the routes to getting the guidance, you know. Are providers actually meeting their needs in that context? I think, technology and things have evolved so quickly, I can imagine there are some organisations that maybe are somewhat behind the game on this."

<div align="right">Stakeholder</div>

Innovative approaches to the management and delivery of IAG can help to target limited resources more effectively and increase the availability of provision for those groups who find it difficult to access services in traditional ways. However, in addition to these key strengths, learners and wider stakeholders also recognise the limitations inherent in some of these methods. These are discussed below, after the reasons for non-use are examined.

Reasons for non-use

Respondents who reported that they do not intend (or did not use) professional IAG services on exit from the FE and Skills sector were asked to provide the reasons why. When their reasons are compared with the reasons given for non-use at the pre-entry stage, some interesting differences arise. Almost half (47.5%) of respondents who did not access pre-entry guidance reported that they were aware of the services but did not believe they needed their help, compared with under a third (31.2%) of those who did not/do not intend to access on exit support. Conversely, a higher proportion of respondents indicated that they preferred to use other sources on exit than pre-entry (21.6% compared with 15.3%). Similarly, a higher proportion of non-users of on-exit provision were unaware of the services available (21.9% compared with 16.8%) or do not know how to access them (9.6% compared with 6.2%). This is further evidence to suggest that more needs to be done to raise the profile of professional IAG services and how they can support learners as they make the transition from initial FE and Skills provision.
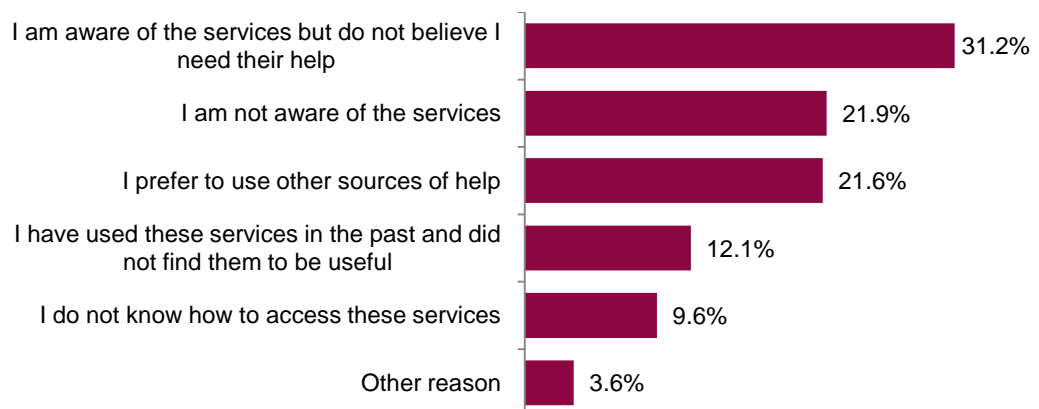
Figure 22: Why learner plans to not use a professional careers service after completing their course/qualification, or why they did not use it if already completed, base = 730

Perceptions of IAG provision

The findings presented in this report demonstrate that learners in the FE and Skills sector access a range of help and support to aid them in their decision-making. On the whole, learners recognise the relative strengths and limitations of the different sources of IAG as well as the different modes of delivery and, as a result, some are perceived to be more useful and/or influential than others. Radical reforms to CLIAG in England are changing the way in which young people in particular interact with formal service provision. In the concluding section of this chapter we examine stakeholders' views on the strengths and limitations of the emerging arrangements in the context of the evidence outlined above concerning what learners want, need and value from the help and support they access.

Overall, stakeholders had mixed views on the changes to CLIAG and the introduction of the NCS. Most regarded the vision for the NCS and the provision for adults in a positive light:

> *"Having a careers service which looks after a person regardless of their age and takes them through, well, in the end has got to be beneficial. It gives continuity, gives the opportunity to check records, it gives the opportunity to ensure that people who give advice at an early age take responsibility for where that advice takes the young person as they go through."*

<div align="right">Stakeholder</div>

> *"It will provide a nationally recognisable, nationally accessible universal service for adults, which stands some chance of beginning to build some degree of public confidence. People will know it's there and will, over time, gradually come to understand what it might do for them. Provided it's promoted, provided there are sufficient resources to enable it to run, then I think broadly, it's good news."*

<div align="right">Stakeholder</div>

However, a wide range of issues were identified regarding the arrangements for young people.

School-based support

As noted previously, responsibility for the provision of IAG will fall to schools. In the absence of robust guidance and additional resources, the extent and quality of provision that will be made available to young people is a key concern for the majority of stakeholders. Many school pupils will not have access to face-to-face support, but will instead be referred to telephone and online support. While, for some, this may be sufficient, it is unlikely to serve the needs of all learners. In addition, there is likely to be considerable variation in the provision of IAG and careers advice. There is a perception that *"some schools will do it really well"* while others, because of resource

constraints or the strategic priority afforded to CLIAG, will not. Linked to this are concerns regarding the monitoring arrangements.

Impartiality was also identified as a key issue by the majority of stakeholders. Some schools, including those with sixth forms, have a vested interest in retaining high-performing students and may, as a result, be less motivated to ensure that pupils are made aware of the full range of options available to them. In addition, staff responsible for the delivery of CLIAG may not hold a relevant guidance qualification and are unlikely to have direct knowledge or experience of alternative routes.

> *"So whether it's deliberate, as we always accuse them of wanting to keep their sixth forms high, and that's true in some cases, but it's often not deliberate. It's the fact that the knowledge of the alternative routes are not within the teaching fraternity, which of course is exclusively graduates. There are exceptions, of course, but it's not the professionals' first-hand experience. So they naturally talk about the experience which has served them very well. So there is a fundamental structural problem here. Now all this has had a dramatic effect on almost the unspoken IAG, which goes on in school, before you actually get to the formal bit."*

<div align="right">Stakeholder</div>

In addition, a lack of impartial CLIAG could also impact on the aspirations and progression opportunities for lower performing students who may not be encouraged to consider HE:

> *"It tends to polarise the schools into those who are focussed on HE, and those who are not. That's just not fair...we are just advantaging certain groups within each other"*

<div align="right">Stakeholder</div>

In the absence of additional resources, however, the knowledge and skills of the staff responsible is just part of the issue, and in the context of the demands of the curriculum, some schools may struggle to allocate the time to deliver CLIAG effectively and comprehensively. This is likely to be an increasing concern, given the drive towards raising the participation age:

> *"If you've got a policy of raising the participation age, a natural part of that needs to be advice and guidance to get people into the right learning for them and yet we haven't really got that, so it's a contradiction"*

<div align="right">Stakeholder</div>

Some schools will commission an external provider to deliver CLIAG on their behalf. Yet concerns were raised regarding the quality of these services, as there is no requirement for providers to possess a recognised quality mark,

and the accessibility of services during the school holidays. With limited budgets, compromises could be made:

> *"I do worry about the schools being responsible for providing careers provision at their expense. I know it's factual because I know some people involved, but people are being recruited by schools because they're cheaper than qualified people but they have some experience...because to recruit somebody with the qualification was too expensive, but that's happened already, and I know it's true. It's terrible, but it's true. I don't know if there'll be more of that going on."*

<div align="right">Stakeholder</div>

Overall, stakeholders were concerned that some young people will not get the support they need to make effective decisions. This could have implications for the resourcing of adult provision as more individuals turn to this service in the future.

> *"Maybe I'm just being hyper-pragmatic here, but if you take away the service for young people if you're at that stage of looking at the first kind of step beyond school, if they get it wrong what a waste of personal investment, institutional investment, you know, sort of national investment if you like. It doesn't seem to make sense. Although I think it's great that there will be face-to-face for adults; but it could mean a lot of that work with adults will be mopping up the mistakes that happened because people did not have proper demonstrative careers education at an earlier stage. It just seems totally topsy-turvy to me."*

<div align="right">Stakeholder</div>

Stakeholders were also unclear about how the service will reach groups of young people not engaged in schools; particular concerns were expressed about the support available for those not currently in education, employment or training (NEET) as well as work-based learners and others studying part-time and at a distance. Previously, Connexions tracked NEET young people, but since the demise of this organisation in many local authority areas, this activity is under threat and could stop altogether. The implications for the FE and Skills sector, as well as for the individual, are significant, as this data fulfils a key role in targeting activities which successfully re-engage this group.

Impact on the FE and Skills sector

Stakeholders reported that many providers in the FE and Skills sector, and GFE colleges in particular, are currently undertaking effective CLIAG with their learners:

> *"Many colleges I know have got some very, very sophisticated and very effective ongoing mentoring and IAG support, which are very, very creditable and very effective."*

<p style="text-align: right; color: #a0005a;">Stakeholder</p>

Stakeholders highlighted that colleges would have access to NCS advisers co-located at their institution to deliver face-to-face services to adults. Since the abolition of Connexions in many areas, however, services for young people have come under threat.

> *"My key concern is who's going to see them? When? Who's going to be working with them actively, getting them out of the house, off the street, into something, either training or education? Who's going to help them find work? You know? I've got a list at reception right now, of sixteen- to eighteen-year-olds waiting for interviews. Obviously I can't see everybody...we've recently stopped taking people on the waiting list...so obviously you don't know where they go off to... That crucial stage between leaving school and turning nineteen where they have to then pay for their education, is missed out and we don't know what's happening to them. What's going to happen to them? That's worrying, because then there's a whole generation of kids that are going to be left behind.*

<p style="text-align: right; color: #a0005a;">Stakeholder</p>

In addition, GFE colleges have had to absorb funding cuts that are impacting on the wider support available to young people:

> *"Reduced funding, and reduced accessibility of those individual specialists, because it's not just the college's reduced funding, it's the reduced funding, you know, nationally, which means that people aren't available and don't have the time. In my own college, for example, we had a very high proportion of young people with learning difficulties and disabilities. Now, five years ago, we had a specific person who was dedicated, on one day a week, to coming into my college and working with those students, from Connexions. That job went about three years ago, and it was a very important job. This is a fact of life, I'm not having a go at the government or anybody about it, it's just that when cuts have to be made, one person retires or moves on, they're not replaced."*

<p style="text-align: right; color: #a0005a;">Stakeholder</p>

Finally, a lack of effective pre-entry IAG can also have a negative impact on recruitment and retention in the FE and Skills sector. Lack of awareness of the range of options available is likely to lead to reduced applications, and those who do apply may be more likely to change course or to drop out altogether if they are not supported to select the right course.

Online service

The online provision was regarded as the main strength of the NCS. Although not appropriate for all learners, this aspect of the system builds on existing development work and facilitates access to information *"at a level that some of us could never have anticipated"*. Some reported that this aspect of the service could be especially useful for part-time or work-based learners (with internet access), as these groups are least likely to access services delivered on campus:

> *"So, that's where, actually, really good E-IAG is going to be very valuable for learners that, you know, perhaps are working 30 miles away from the institution...*[who] *very rarely actually set foot in the building."*

> Stakeholder

Awareness of this service remains a key concern, however, particularly for adults who have limited contact with a learning provider or other organisation that may signpost learners:

> *"This Next Step thing that's been set up is at the moment very good. It's got an excellent programme, and if you go onto the website, it's got some super things like CV planning, job profiles, lots of really good information on the internet, but it's amazing how many people don't know about it and what a good service it is."*

> Stakeholder

Summary

In spite of the variability in CLIAG provision, the majority of learners access some form of help and support with their decision-making pre-entry, but demand from learners while on programme declines substantially. Previous use appears to increase the likelihood that a learner will access IAG during their course, although further investigation is required to establish a conclusive link.

The majority of learners who access IAG while on programme require support with future progression; only a small proportion seeks help to change course. This suggests, on the whole, that the support that learners currently access pre-entry enables them to make effective choices. However, as the extent and nature of CLIAG changes, it will be important to monitor any corresponding shift in retention as well as the impact the changes have on institutional CLIAG provision.

Building on existing partnership links with external IAG providers and further integrating CLIAG into the curriculum are just two of the ways learning providers could begin to develop a comprehensive and cost effective offer for

learners within the context of the wider reforms to career guidance and further education. However, the implementation of measures resulting in the co-location of services must take account of learners' perceptions of the college environment. Failure to do this could result in some learner groups, who already experience barriers to provision because of their work-based status, feeling inhibited and unable to access services.

A significant minority of learners intend to access IAG on exit from the FE and Skills system, but a much smaller proportion actually does. The reasons for this require further investigation, but the continued role and influence of informal support could offer a partial explanation. Tutors appear to be particularly influential at this stage in the learner journey because of the rapport they have built over the course of the programme. New occupational standards and qualifications in advice and guidance tailored towards practitioners operating at different levels have been developed by LSIS. Up-skilling more tutors in this way could help improve the support they offer to learners and reduce the pressure on IAG professionals.

Although there is evidence that the majority of learners prefer face-to-face delivery, and despite a belief within the sector that face-to-face support is essential for learners with multiple and complex needs, it is highly likely that fewer (particularly, young) people will be able to access services in this way in the future. Indeed, this issue and the potential erosion of the quality and impartiality of CLIAG for this group are perceived to be the key drawbacks of the NCS and, more generally, of the reforms to career guidance policy. That said, a universal entitlement to face-to-face provision for people of all ages is neither achievable nor desirable as learners with well-developed career management skills and high readiness for career decision-making often do not require this level of intervention. Greater emphasis should, therefore, be placed on helping learners to understand their level of skill and readiness to make decisions as well as the type of intervention that could best meet their needs. This could usefully involve raising awareness of the telephone advice and online service which will be delivered through the NCS as well as the wider career support market. These issues are further explored in the next chapter.

5 | Career management skills

This section explores the extent to which learners perceive they have the skills they need to make effective decisions and to succeed in learning and work, the importance attached to career management and employability skills, and the ways in which learners develop these skills.

The Blueprint for Careers

In the context of the economic downturn and the increasing difficulties of finding and securing sustainable employment, LSIS has explored ways to support providers to develop learners' career management skills and ensure they are equipped to find work. *The Blueprint for Careers*, developed by LSIS, builds upon similar models in Canada and Australia and presents a framework to help individuals manage their careers and make effective and well-informed choices about life, learning, and work.

The Blueprint is a competency-based framework that consists of 11 career-learning areas designed to guide an individual's personal development and decision-making. It is organised under three key headings:

- Understanding and developing myself

- Exploring life, learning and work

- Developing and managing my career

The framework is designed for use by those providing CLIAG to enable them to develop the career-management skills of individuals and to empower them to make their own decisions about learning and work. It has been trialled by a range of learning organisations across England who have developed courses using the Blueprint competencies. Findings from the trials have shown that the Blueprint has been useful in informing curriculum development, assisting individuals to move back into work, improving learners' decision-making and employability skills and preventing drop-out.[77]

Self-assessment of career management skills

To explore learners' assessment of their own career management skills, CFE developed a series of statements reflecting the main skill areas of the LSIS *Blueprint for Careers*. Survey respondents were asked to rate to what extent they agreed with these statements on a scale of 1–7, where 1 equalled 'I do not agree at all' and 7 equalled 'I completely agree'.
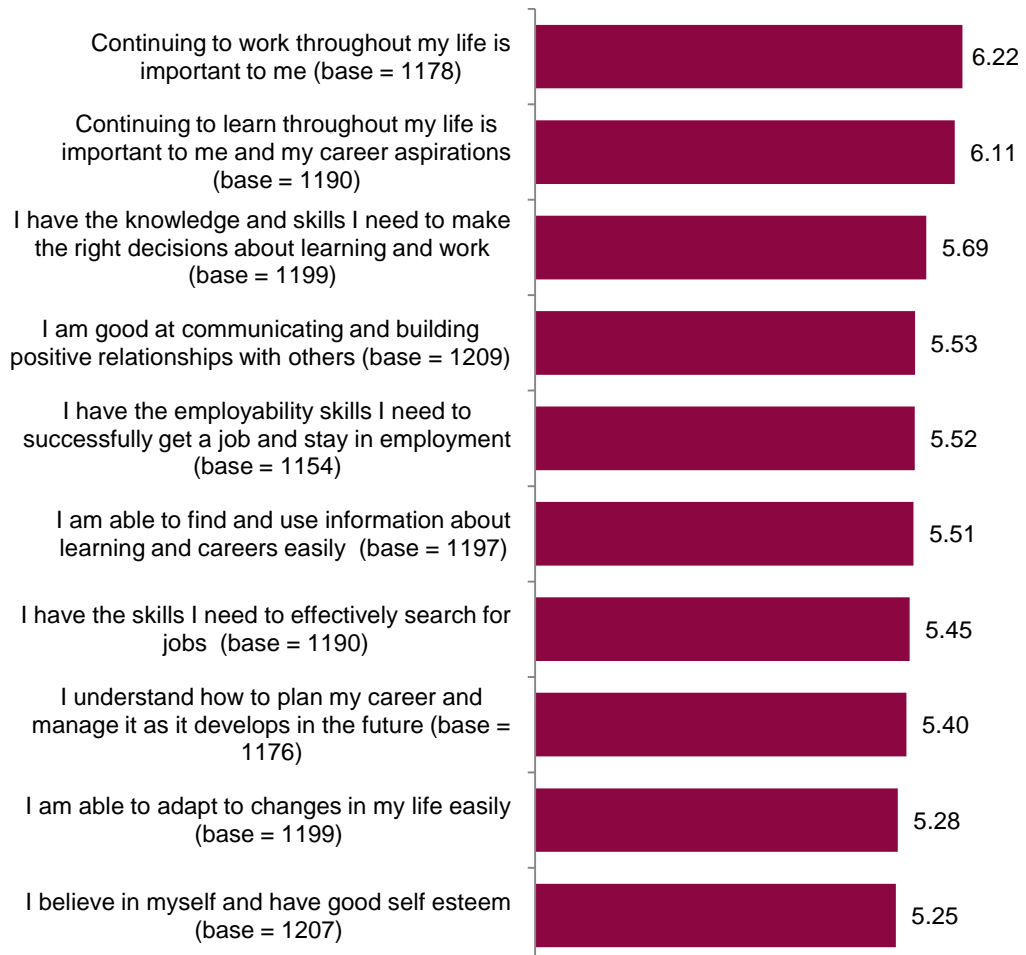
The survey findings revealed that, overall, learners rate their career-management skills highly, giving a mean score of over 5 for all statements (see Figure 23). Gaining and maintaining a form of employment was the most important factor to respondents – '*continuing to work throughout my life is*

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[77] http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=315924

important to me' received a mean score of 6.22 and, *'continuing to learn throughout my life is import to me and my career aspirations'* received a mean score of 6.11.

Focus group discussions with learners revealed that the majority had 'clear progression plans'[78] with an end career in mind as this typical response from a learner demonstrates: *" I want to achieve my goals in my future career and without a university degree I cannot have my chosen career."*

Statement	Score
Continuing to work throughout my life is important to me (base = 1178)	6.22
Continuing to learn throughout my life is important to me and my career aspirations (base = 1190)	6.11
I have the knowledge and skills I need to make the right decisions about learning and work (base = 1199)	5.69
I am good at communicating and building positive relationships with others (base = 1209)	5.53
I have the employability skills I need to successfully get a job and stay in employment (base = 1154)	5.52
I am able to find and use information about learning and careers easily (base = 1197)	5.51
I have the skills I need to effectively search for jobs (base = 1190)	5.45
I understand how to plan my career and manage it as it develops in the future (base = 1176)	5.40
I am able to adapt to changes in my life easily (base = 1199)	5.28
I believe in myself and have good self esteem (base = 1207)	5.25

Figure 23: To what extent the learner agreed with the following statements: on a scale of 1–7 where 1 = I do not agree at all and 7 = I completely agree, base = variable

In order to explore these data in more detail, respondents were divided into two groups based on their mean scores, as follows:

- Group 1: includes 55.7 per cent of learners and is characterised by mean scores over 6 for all the career management skill areas outlined in Figure 23

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[78] It was not a purpose of the focus groups to explore how realistic, or achievable, the progression plans of individuals were. The fact that learners had career goals is not untypical. However, it cannot be assumed that having a plan is an indication that it is realistic, or that choices have been fully-informed.

- Group 2: includes 44.3 per cent of learners and is characterised by more modest mean scores of between 4 and 6 for all across all career-management skill areas outlined in Figure 23

A review of the profile of the two groups indicated that there are substantial differences in a number of their key characteristics. For example, age is a significant factor in respondents' opinions about their career management skills. Those learners aged 16–18 were less likely to be in Group 1 (51.9%) than those aged 19–24 (61.1%) or 25 or more (62.1%).

Similarly, gender also has a significant influence over how learners rate their career management skills, with males more likely to be in Group 1 (61.4%) than females (50.9%). Conversely, those who indicated they had a learning difficulty, disability or health/medical condition were more likely to be in Group 2 (64.3%) when compared to all other learners (41.4%).

The place where a learner is studying is also significant in how they rated their career management skills. Learners in Group 1 (i.e., those who are more confident about their skills) are more likely to be studying with a private training provider (71.8%) compared to a FE College (57.6%), school sixth form (54.5%) or Sixth Form College (46.7%).

Development of career management skills

Learners were asked to rate on a scale of 1–7 (where 1 equalled 'I do not agree at all' and 7 equalled 'I completely agree') the extent to which the help and support they have received so far (including formal or informal support) had enabled them to develop their career management skills.

Overall, learners did believe the help and support they had received (either formally or informally) had enabled them to develop their career management skills, with an overall average score of 5.6. Further analysis[79] was undertaken to investigate whether there was a relationship between this overall score and how the learners scored themselves against each of the ten skill areas. A relationship was found between three skill areas. These are presented below, in order of priority in terms of how strongly they affected a learner's overall score:

- 'I understand how to plan my career and manage it as it develops in the future'

- 'I am able to find and use information about learning and careers easily'

- 'I believe in myself and have good self-esteem'

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[79] Regression analysis.

This would suggest that the process of guidance has supported 'career learning' and that it may contribute to their feeling of self-confidence and self-worth, both of which are well-evidenced in the literature.[80]

The overall score given by learners was further explored by a number of profile variables. A significant difference was found between those who had *not* accessed IAG before entering FE (5.03) and those who had either accessed professional and informal IAG (5.64) or informal IAG only (5.59). Differences were also found for those who had not accessed IAG *whilst in* FE, with an average score of 5.06 compared to accessing both professional and informal (5.60) and only informal support (5.69). These results indicate that those who rated themselves highest believed that the support they have received – from either formal or informal sources – has contributed to the development of these skills.

The individual learner consultations revealed that learners develop their career management skills in a variety of ways. When probed, the majority of mature learners indicated that experience gained through employment was the most significant contributor towards being – or feeling – competent in these areas.

As highlighted in Chapter 3, mature learners revealed that, where these had occurred, their experiences of one-to-one discussions about their professional development needs with their employer[81] and exposure to training and learning opportunities meant that they were able to recognise not only the value of personal development but also to appreciate the career-management skills that they have gained through such exercises (for example, through regular appraisals):

> *"I've developed those skills through work mainly. You get the opportunity to explore where you want to be and what training is available to you every year. You learn to pick up where you can access it and it gives you exposure to the type of learning that's available to you."*

<div align="right">

Learner interviewee

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> *"I feel very capable and very informed as I've worked in the sector for a long time. Working for a large care company too means that I get signposted to a wide range of training opportunities so I'm used to picking out the courses that are the most suitable."*

<div align="right">

Learner interviewee

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[80] See, for example: Killeen, J., Kidd, J.M., Sampson, J., & White, M. (1994) *A Review of the Measures of Learning Outcomes of Guidance Cambridge, NICEC* and Hughes, D., & Gration, G. (2009) *Evidence and Impact: Careers and Guidance-Related Interventions.* Reading: CfBT.

[81] Previous research with learners has stressed the vital role that employers play in providing career guidance/IAG, although this role is often not well understood or formalised (See for example: Guidance Council (2005) *Demand for and perceptions of information, advice and guidance – A Research study for the Guidance Council by MORI.* Leicester: Guidance Council).

In other examples, a minority of learners with managerial responsibility at work drew upon their management training that included conducting appraisals for their staff. As well as supporting others, they applied these skills to support their own development: *"I've done information and advice courses which has taught me these skills. I've used these skills to help others, but I do use those skills on myself."*

Other mature learners who were undertaking a FE course as part of a strategy to change career cited that their prior career history, too, was key in developing proficiency in their career management skills:

> *"I wanted to do something completely different as I wasn't getting anywhere in my job. I needed to do a course that would steer me away and onto something that I was interested in. Being in work means you're aware what works and does not work for you and you can tease it out. This helped me decide what I wanted to do with my life".*

<div align="right">

Learner interviewee

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Consultations with younger learners provided more mixed recollections of where they had developed, or where they were developing, their career-management skills. The majority of younger learners were able (when prompted) to recall undertaking formal exercises at school such as CV writing, discussing their options post-16 and performing mock and actual job searches. However, some younger learners were critical of both the lack of depth to the support given and its timing:

> *"[the support] needs to be more integrated in school .The school should have helped us more, they gave us a book on what you can do at college and that was it really."*

<div align="right">

Learner interviewee

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> *"I wish there was more focus on it, say before you turn 16 not only on what courses are available but also the type of experience you need to get the job. This is something employers are hot on. So that's important too."*

<div align="right">

Learner interviewee

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Other younger learners suggested that they were able to apply the research skills they were developing during their studies to investigating their future learning and work decisions:

> *"The key skills I'm picking up now and those you develop at school: the researching, being accurate, problem solving mean you're being more critical with your own future decisions."*

<div align="right">

Learner interviewee

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A minority of younger learners were able to recall having sought professional help from the Connexions service. Here, learners cited that meetings with

advisers had provided them with something of a career management framework which they could apply themselves in the future:

> *"They asked some questions about what I wanted to do, what I wanted to be, where I could do it…Nothing mind blowing but it's like giving yourself a map and pointing you in a direction, which I'll continue to use after university."*
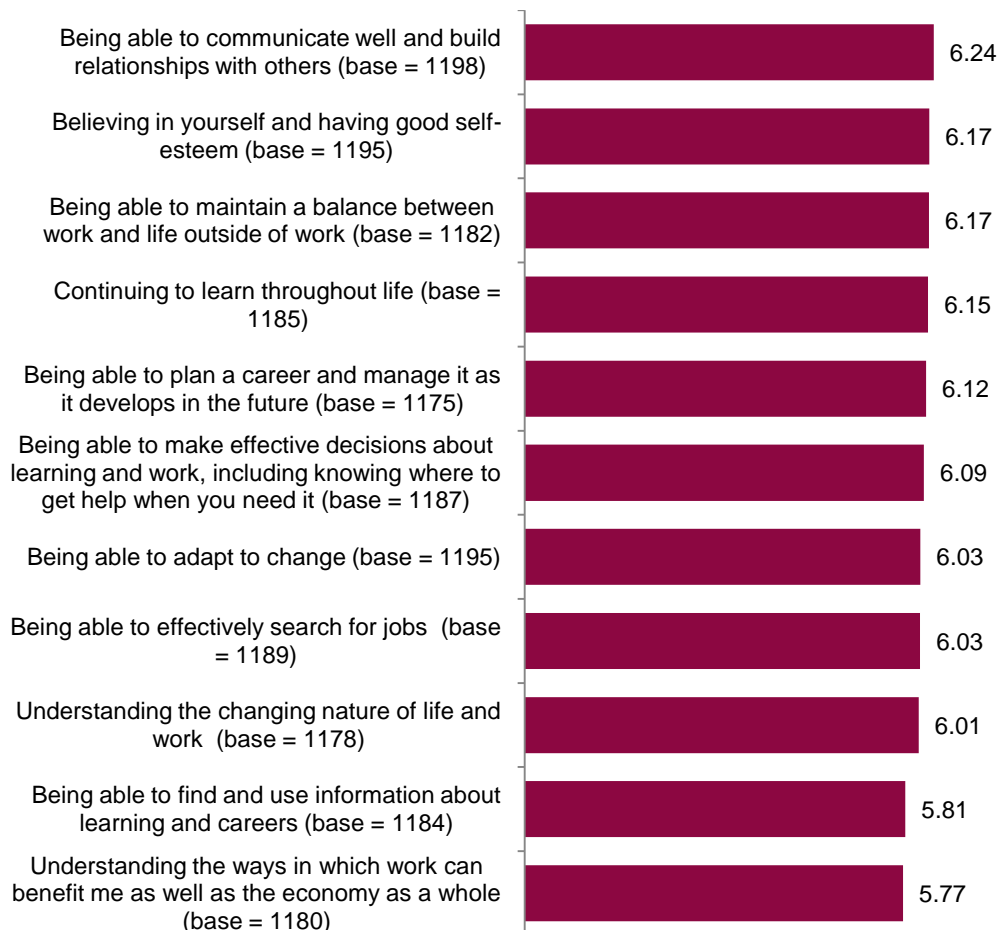
<div align="right">Learner interviewee</div>

In contrast, the majority of younger learners were unable to recall receiving any formal interventions or being provided with any support with learning or work decisions while at school. These young learners potentially provide a particular challenge to FE and Skills providers, as previous research indicates that this group are the most likely to select inappropriate courses and, as a result, to be most likely to under-perform and/or discontinue their studies.

Importance of career management skills

To explore learners' perceptions of the importance of career management skills, CFE developed a second series of statements, again reflecting the main skill areas of the LSIS *Blueprint for Careers*. Respondents were asked how important these skills were on a scale of 1–7 where 1 equalled 'not important at all' and 7 equalled 'very important'.

As show in Figure 24, learners reported that they felt that <u>all</u> of the career management skills identified in the LSIS *Blueprint for Careers* were important, with mean scores of over five for all statements. The most highly-rated skill was '*being able to communicate well and build relationships with others'* (mean score of 6.24), followed by *'believing in yourself and having good self-esteem'* and *'being able to maintain a balance between work and life outside of work'* (both with mean scores of 6.17).

Factor	Score
Being able to communicate well and build relationships with others (base = 1198)	6.24
Believing in yourself and having good self-esteem (base = 1195)	6.17
Being able to maintain a balance between work and life outside of work (base = 1182)	6.17
Continuing to learn throughout life (base = 1185)	6.15
Being able to plan a career and manage it as it develops in the future (base = 1175)	6.12
Being able to make effective decisions about learning and work, including knowing where to get help when you need it (base = 1187)	6.09
Being able to adapt to change (base = 1195)	6.03
Being able to effectively search for jobs (base = 1189)	6.03
Understanding the changing nature of life and work (base = 1178)	6.01
Being able to find and use information about learning and careers (base = 1184)	5.81
Understanding the ways in which work can benefit me as well as the economy as a whole (base = 1180)	5.77

Figure 24: How important the learner thought the following factors were in helping them to succeed in learning and work: on a scale of 1–7 where 1 = not important at all and 7 = very important, base = variable

Interviews with learners highlighted the importance they place on communication skills in the context of both learning and work. From a learning perspective, learners highlighted that communication skills were important to support their future applications to university. For example, one said:

> *"I've had both informal telephone conversations with university course leaders as well as a more formal interview as my grades are not quite high enough. I think being able to communicate effectively is important to get across your interest in the subject."*

<div align="right">

Learner interviewee
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From a work perspective, learners cited on several occasions that they felt communication skills would be vital in order for them to secure future employment:

> *"It's hard to get a job. I can imagine that you can look good on paper with your qualification, but if you don't promote yourself enough then I think you run the risk of not giving them a reason to hire you."*

<div align="right">

Learner interviewee
</div>

The consultations also highlighted the value that learners place on confidence and on having a strong sense of self-esteem as qualities necessary to shaping their future careers. Learners on several occasions talked of having varying degrees of confidence in respect to searching and applying for courses and work. The majority of learners felt themselves confident enough to make 'good decisions' about learning at work. By their own admission, a minority of learners – whilst recognising the importance of these competencies –lacked such confidence. This was often linked to concerns about lacking experience of selection interviews and/or work experience.

A minority of mature learners raised prior negative experiences of careers advice, several years ago, that had affected their confidence earlier on in their lives. Another said, *"I got laughed at for my career choice, which knocked me back. The problem then was that no one would ask you what you wanted to do after school."*

Opinions with regard to ensuring 'work-life balance' were more frequent amongst mature than younger learners. As highlighted in Chapter 3, mature learners cited having to deal with additional commitments (e.g. work) and responsibilities (e.g. caring/parental responsibilities) when making decisions about learning at work. For them, having the skills to weigh up the benefits of learning to develop their career, against the impact it would have on their personal or family life, were critical.

> *"My family comes first, so when it came to deciding whether to go to college I had to think about what I could do that would not disrupt too much the time I spend with them as I work full time."*

<div align="right" style="color:#a02050">Learner interviewee</div>

We conducted further analysis[82] to segment learners into three groups based on their answers to the *importance* of the identified career management skills areas:

- Group 1: includes 34.9 per cent of learners and is characterised by extremely high scores across all skill areas. On average these were between 6.8 and 6.9.

- Group 2: includes 45.4 per cent of learners and is characterised by overall high scores across all skill areas. On average these were between 5 and 6.5.

- Group 3: includes 19.7 per cent of learners and is characterised by overall lower scores across all skill areas. On average these were between 4 and 5.

Exploring the profile of the three groups, again we find that age is a key factor in the importance attributed to career management skills. Those in Group 1, with the highest importance scores, were more likely to be 25 years old or older (50.3%) compared to 19–24 year olds (40.9%) and 16–18 year olds

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[82] Cluster analysis

(29.0%). Alongside this, those who have the lowest scores and are in Group 3 were more likely to be 16–18 year olds (22.5%) or 19–24 year olds (20.2%) compared to those aged 25 years or older (8.3%)

Where a learner was studying was again significant in the importance they placed on career management skills, with those who were in a FE College more likely to appear in Group 1 (39.4%) than those from a Sixth Form College (29.2%) or a School Sixth Form (23.5%). Those who studied part-time were more likely to appear in Group 1 (49.3%) compared to those studying full-time (30.8%). In conjunction with this, those who study full-time were more likely to appear in Group 3 (21.4%) when compared to part-time learners (16.1%), indicating overall that part-time learners placed a higher importance on career management skills.

Learners who are male were more likely to be in Group 3 (23.1%) compared to those who are female (16.6%). Therefore, although they are more likely to rate themselves highly in having these skills, they placed less importance on them overall.

Summary

The work undertaken by LSIS in piloting and trialling[83] the Blueprint model indicates that it is an important element of developing an effective all-age guidance strategy.

It is clear from the survey results that some learners, particularly mature men studying with private training providers, have a strong sense of the career-management skills they feel they have acquired, often through their employment history, and also are most likely to recognise their importance. By contrast, younger, often female, learners and those with a learning difficulty or disabilities are far less confident in their skills and do not always recognise their importance. In both cases, it is clear that informal – and, in some instances, professional support – appears to have had an impact on the development of their career management skills, reflecting the findings in wider research on the economic, social and learning outcomes of career guidance.

It is difficult to assess from this research how justified individuals' views of their own career management competencies are. Certainly the process of guidance, if conducted by somebody with appropriate skills and an understanding of the options and opportunities in learning and labour markets, enables these understandings and self-perceptions to be explored and challenged and, if appropriate, additional support to be provided. However, it will not always be possible for a guidance professional to facilitate this process. There is, therefore, an important role for effective mechanisms of self-assessment.

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[83] See: LSIS (2010) *Career Learning for the 21st Century – Careers blueprint supporting an all-age guidance strategy* http://www.lsis.org.uk/Services/Publications/Documents/LSIS231-1CareerLearningBlueprint.pdf

In summary, this review has emphasised both how significant – and potentially how under-valued – career management skills are. It also demonstrates the need to help individuals to reflect on them as a prerequisite for identifying what support (if any) they require and for subsequently making informed learning and career choices.

6 | Conclusions

The aim of this research was to develop a more sophisticated understanding of CLIAG in the FE and Skills sector. This was a relatively under-researched area, as much of the existing literature focuses on provision for young people in schools. This report adds substantially to the evidence base on the diversity of the FE and Skills sector, the complexity of learners' support needs, and the issues and challenges of delivering CLIAG to this group. It also offers valuable insights into the areas that require further investigation. Finally, this report is extremely timely, providing a benchmark during the implementation of radical reforms to career guidance in England.

Role and importance of CLIAG

It is impossible to define a 'typical learner' in the FE and Skills system; the personal characteristics and circumstances of individuals vary considerably, as do their goals and aspirations and the ways in which they interact with the learning environment. Many learners have multiple and complex needs which can act as barriers to access, participation and achievement. These, and a range of other personal and increasingly pragmatic factors, also impact on their decisions about learning and work. As a result, the majority seek help and support with decision-making throughout their journey into and through the FE and Skills system and recognise the importance of developing effective career management skills and attitudes. As the costs borne by individual learners for education as well as competition for jobs increase, learners also appear acutely aware of the implications of poor choices for them and their families.

Very few learners rely on one source of help and support; rather they draw on a range of sources, both formal and informal, which are each recognised for the contribution they make to the decision-making process. On the whole, learners regard formal IAG as useful, but informal help and support exerts more of an influence. Learners' perceptions of the role and importance of formal CLIAG, as well as their patterns of use can, therefore, only be fully understood when considered in relation to the informal support mechanisms that they access. It is important that any future research to examine the specific needs of different learner groups, their reasons and motivations for accessing help and support with decision-making, and their perceptions of the usefulness and influence as well as satisfaction with provision takes this into account.

Current CLIAG provision in the FE and Skills sector has been shown to be variable. However, when delivery is timely and of high quality it can have a positive impact on decision-making as well as the development of career management skills. It fulfils a crucial role by challenging thinking and providing balance to the potentially partial and inaccurate views of influential peers. Nevertheless, the importance of this function may not be fully recognised by learners, many of whom exhibit a high degree of confidence in their ability to make effective decisions. Exploring and, where appropriate,

challenging learner confidence in this regard in order to help them to understand their capability and readiness for career decision-making at an early stage should, therefore, be a key consideration for IAG and learning providers.

Learners access formal IAG in a variety of ways including face-to-face, by telephone, email and via the internet. Given the choice, most learners, and young people in particular, would prefer to speak to an adviser in person when exploring their learning and career options. Guidance delivered in this way is regarded as essential for those learners with complex needs. However, current reforms to career guidance for young people place less emphasis on face-to-face services, favouring instead telephone and online provision. In this context, learning providers should consider how they can support learners to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the type of intervention that could best meet their needs, including the role and value of local labour market information, telephone advice and the wider career support market. Integrated programmes of career-learning could make an important contribution in this regard and help to minimise the additional burden this may place on providers and staff.

The nature of learners' needs and the type of help and support they seek varies according to the stage they are at in the learner journey, although the evidence suggests that there may be a link between previous and future use of IAG irrespective of stage. Formal CLIAG appears to fulfil a more significant role pre-entry and on-exit from the FE and Skills sector, with use declining substantially while learners are on programme. During this stage, learners are more likely to turn to informal sources and tutor/assessors in particular. It is, therefore, important that tutors are appropriately up-skilled to offer informed and impartial advice and support and/or refer learners to alternative provision. Continuous professional development for teaching staff and assessors clearly has a key role. However, an integrated programme of career learning can also help to underpin the work of tutors and assessors by helping to support learner achievement and progression as well as wider goals associated with social mobility.

The future of IAG policy

The new National Careers Service (NCS) will be launched in April 2012. Its core purpose is to support economic growth and the development of an efficient labour market through the provision of IAG for individuals that both informs and stimulates demand for FE, work-based training and HE.[84] Although individuals of all ages will be able to utilise the NCS, access to some services will continue to be differentiated on the basis of age. In addition, the statutory duty on schools to provide a programme of CEG has been removed; instead schools will assume responsibility for securing access to independent and impartial advice for their pupils. Policy-makers are currently debating the possibility of extending this responsibility to GFE colleges.

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[84] BIS (2011) *New Challenges, New Choices: FE & Skills System Reform Plan: Building a World Class Skills System.* London: BIS.

The guidance sector has expressed a range of concerns about the reforms and their implications for individuals and IAG and learning providers. Principal among these are the erosion of face-to-face guidance as well as the quality and impartiality of services for young people. Until the policy regarding the responsibility of colleges is clarified, the provision of services to 16 to 18 year olds who are not in school will also remain a key issue, particularly as FE and Skills providers already anticipate increased demand from learners who have not been adequately supported pre-entry. It will be important to monitor changes in extent and nature of demand for services from this group, as well as the impact on providers, through future research.

Despite their concerns, stakeholders also recognise some key strengths of the new service, including the opportunity to track learners of all ages throughout their journey, the online service, and face-to-face provision for adults. However, we have noted throughout this report that young people rather than adults are the main 'consumers' of formal IAG. In addition, they are more likely to express a preference, and need, for face-to-face interventions. Many adults (in particular those in work) have extensive informal networks to draw upon, as well as their own experience, and are more likely to seek remote IAG because of the constraints on their time. There appears, therefore, to be somewhat of a disconnect between demand for services and the current direction of career guidance policy. This suggests that the 'learner voice' is not adequately reflected in current IAG policy. Policy-makers, along with the IAG providers and the learning and skills sector, may, therefore, wish to consider how learners' views can be better integrated into policy and practice as it develops in the future.

Although the reforms to career guidance have not yet been fully implemented, there is evidence that IAG and learning providers are already responding to the challenges. Organisational strategies, along with new or refined offers for individuals and partners, including schools, are being developed. Alternative models of delivery are also being considered, including the co-location of services. However, this also raises a number of issues that warrant further exploration, including the extent to which services and/or service-users will be impacted by increased competition between providers and the 'marketisation' of career guidance.

Finally, we return to our starting point – the diverse and complex needs of learners in the FE and Skills sector. What is clear is that many learners face multiple issues which extend beyond the realm of learning and career decision-making but which impact upon it. What is required is a comprehensive, responsive and, above all, integrated system capable of identifying and understanding learners' needs and delivering timely solutions. In order to achieve this, a more sophisticated strategic approach is required which brings together the range of support services, including career guidance, in a co-ordinated way.

Issues and challenges

Given current policy and what we have learned about the CLIAG needs of learners in the FE and Skills sector, the key issues and challenges for policy-makers and IAG and learning providers include:

- **Defining service levels:** In the absence of a mandatory framework for CLIAG provision in the FE and Skills sector, a key task is to decide how individuals' needs are to be identified and met. The development of more effective mechanisms for capturing the 'learner voice' would help to ensure that learners' needs and preferences for service delivery are articulated to policymakers and providers. In addition, the work which LSIS has led with the sector into key career learning competencies (the 'Blueprint for Careers')[85] has helped provide a clear development framework for staff and learners. However, it is clear from current evidence that service levels are variable and if policy ambitions are to be met, further work will need to be undertaken.

- **Developing information sources:** Current policy highlights the centrality of information about 'careers and skills' in guiding and informing choice. A range of work is happening across Government to create open-data sources, although as a number of projects are highlighting there is an associated need for information, including destination data and labour market intelligence, to be analysed and interpreted and to be made available in accessible and usable forms for advisers and their clients.

- **Developing delivery models:** There is a growing need to consider what CLIAG delivery models can best be developed which take account of the 'learner voice' and the relationship between 'formal' provision, 'informal' support available to specific individuals (e.g. from employers, friends and families) and the wider 'career support market' (e.g. via the internet). The Government has made it clear in the FE Reform Plan that the NCS will have a presence in a wide range of organisations, including GFE colleges, community centres, shops and places of worship. Next Step already has presence in 139 colleges, and some (such as Barnet and Southgate College) are developing innovative new models combining careers support and job search.

- **Resourcing:** A key area for providers will be to consider how services are resourced. There is a clear implication in current Government policy that more will have to be delivered for less. Many GFE colleges have already experienced a reduction in resources resulting from the withdrawal of support from Connexions; further challenges are expected as the full effects of the reduction in enrichment activities (from 114 to 30 guided learning hours) are felt.

- **Staff development:** A wide range of staff in the FE and Skills sector are involved in the delivery of CLIAG. These include specialist careers

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[85] See: http://www.lsis.org.uk/AboutLSIS/MediaCentre/NewsArticles/Pages/The-Blueprint-for-Careers-pointing-the-way-to-success.aspx

practitioners and other staff within student services as well as lecturers/teachers, assessors, tutors and others such as admissions staff and learning assistants. A continuing issue is that many of these staff may feel no direct responsibility for or engagement in CLIAG activities and/or may have skill gaps in vital areas such as the interpretation and use of career-related labour market information. Addressing skill gaps and professionalising the guidance workforce is high on the agenda within the sector. LSIS has developed a range of training to support staff development including resources on the Career Development section of the Excellence Gateway[86] and an online resource, 'Career learning for all'[87], which is available free of charge. In addition, new occupational standards for the guidance profession have been developed along with a suite of qualifications for staff operating at all levels.

Finally, given a fast-changing policy environment, limited resources and a challenging labour market, it is vitally important to be clear about what needs to be done to meet individuals' needs and wider policy goals. Research can fulfil a crucial role, helping to establish what works for whom, when, why, and how.

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[86] See: http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/1329
[87] See http://www.leadershiplearning.org,uk

Appendix 1 | List of stakeholder organisations

The following is a list of the organisations that took part in the 'Top-Down' stage of the research.

Association for Careers Education and Guidance (ACEG)
Association of Colleges (AoC)
Association of Employment Learning Providers (AELP)
Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL)
Braunstone Multi Access Centre
Bridgwater College
Careers Wales North West
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)
Institute of Career Guidance (ICG)
Lambeth College
The Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS)
National Association of Educational Guidance for Adults (NAEGA)
Skills Development Scotland (SDS)
unionlearn
Waltham Forest College

We are also grateful to Professor Tony Watts, OBE for offering his expert opinion.

Appendix 2 | Learner profile

This section outlines the key characteristics of those who took part in the learner survey.

Age of learner	Percentage
16 to 18	62.7%
19 to 24	23.4%
25 to 34	5.2%
35 to 44	4.8%
45 or older	3.9%

Table 2: Age of learner, base = 1,203

Gender of learner	Percentage
Male	46.8%
Female	52.7%
Transgender	0.1%
Other	0.1%
Prefer not to say	0.4%

Table 3: Gender of learner, base = 1,225

Ethnicity of learner	Percentage
White	74.1%
Black	9.0%
Asian	8.7%
Mixed	4.2%
Other	2.0%
Prefer not to say	1.9%

Table 4: Ethnicity of learner, base = 1,225

If learner has a learning difficulty, disability or health condition	Percentage
Yes	12.7%
No	83.7%
Prefer not to say	3.6%

Table 5: If learner has a physical or sensory impairment, mental health difficulty, medical condition and/or specific learning difficulty, base = 1,209

If learner has ever been convicted of a criminal offence	Percentage
Yes	2.1%
No	96.1%
Prefer not to say	1.8%

Table 6: If learner has ever been convicted of a criminal offences, base = 1,219

Highest qualification stated by learner	Percentage
No qualifications gained so far	2.4%
Entry Level (e.g. ESOL, Skills for life qualifications, Entry Level Award, Certificate or Diplomas)	2.1%
Level 1 (e.g. GCSEs grades D-G, BTEC Level 1, NVQ Level 1, Foundation diploma)	6.1%
Level 2 (e.g. GCSEs grades A*-C, BTEC Level 2, NVQ Level 2, Apprenticeship or a Higher Diploma)	46.8%
Level 3 (e.g. A levels, BTEC Level 3, NVQ Level 3, Advanced Apprenticeship)	30.6%
Level 4 (BTEC HNC, HND, NVQ Level 4)	3.0%
Level 5 (NVQ L5/Foundation degree/Higher National Diploma)	1.8%
Level 6 (BSc/other Bachelor's degree)	2.3%
Level 7 (MSc/other Master's degree)	0.7%
Don't know	3.5%
Other	0.7%

Table 7: Highest qualification learner currently holds, base = 1,225

Employment status of the learner	Percentage
Yes I work full-time	11.0%
Yes I work part-time	32.5%
I do not currently work but am looking for a job	40.4%
I do not currently work and I am not looking for a job	16.2%

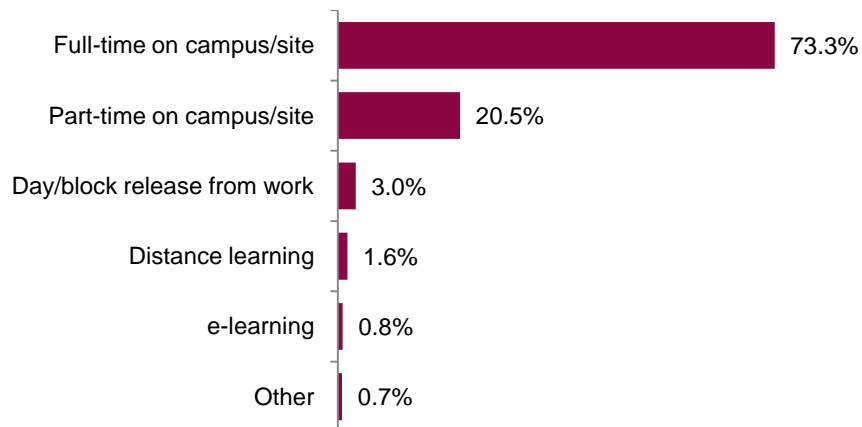**Table 8: Current employment status of learner, base = 1,213**

Where learner lives	Percentage
With my parent(s) or guardian(s)	75.1%
In my own apartment/house/flat	15.2%
In a shared house/apartment/flat (with friends or other learners)	4.3%
In student accommodation	3.5%
In supported accommodation (e.g. funded or run by Social Services such as a hostel or sheltered housing)	1.2%
Other	0.7%

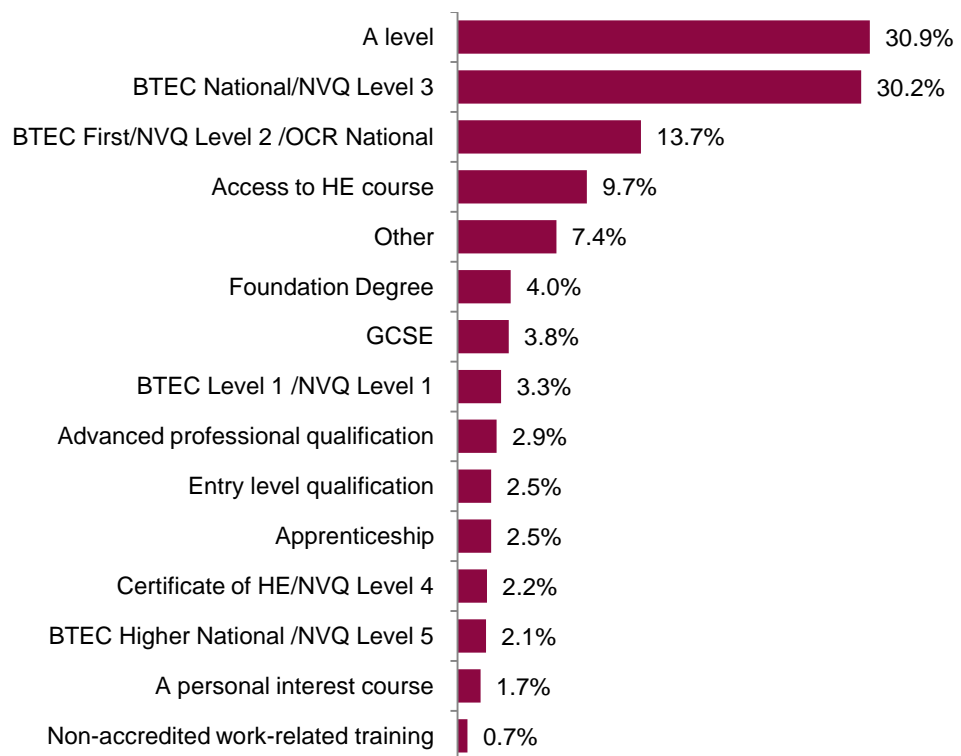**Table 9: Where the learner lives most of the time, base = 1,230**

Learners' household income	Percentage
No one in my household currently works	12.5%
Less than £10,000	11.5%
£10,000 - £19,999	12.7%
£20,000 - £29,999	10.4%
£30,000 - £39,999	9.2%
£40,000 - £49,999	4.6%
£50,000 - £59,999	3.2%
£60,000 or more	3.7%
Prefer not to say	32.3%

**Table 10: Combined household income before tax, base = 1,224**

Full-time on campus/site 73.3%
Part-time on campus/site 20.5%
Day/block release from work 3.0%
Distance learning 1.6%
e-learning 0.8%
Other 0.7%

Figure 25: Learners mode of study, base = 1,228

A level 30.9%
BTEC National/NVQ Level 3 30.2%
BTEC First/NVQ Level 2 /OCR National 13.7%
Access to HE course 9.7%
Other 7.4%
Foundation Degree 4.0%
GCSE 3.8%
BTEC Level 1 /NVQ Level 1 3.3%
Advanced professional qualification 2.9%
Entry level qualification 2.5%
Apprenticeship 2.5%
Certificate of HE/NVQ Level 4 2.2%
BTEC Higher National /NVQ Level 5 2.1%
A personal interest course 1.7%
Non-accredited work-related training 0.7%

Figure 26: Learners' courses currently studying, had studied, or planned to study, base = 1,230 – multiple responses possible
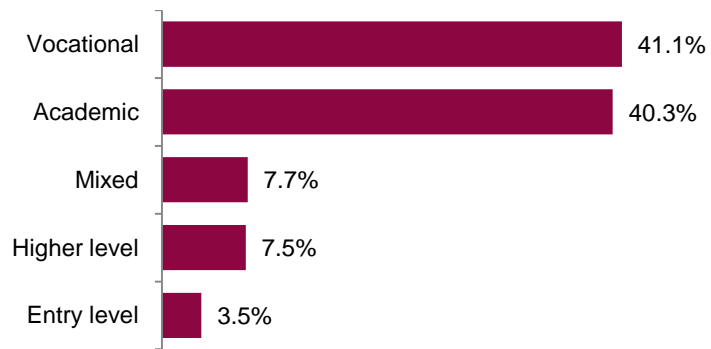
Figure 27: Type of qualification being studied by learner, base = 1,110