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WELCOME
TO ISSUES

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INTRODUCTION

IEP Journal Guest Editors

Professor Alex Nunn, Dean of Research, Leeds Trinity University and Dr Andrew Morton, Research and Knowledge Exchange Officer, Leeds Trinity University.



‘Localism’ has been popularised by politicians of governing and opposition parties alike in a country that has, in the round, remained stubbornly centralised.

Employment services, employment policy and employability programmes are not immune from this paradox: the political valorisation of the local, and occasional and uneven bouts of devolution, with persistent centralisation.

It is particularly problematic in the case of the employment challenges we face, as these are not only felt very differently in different places but, more substantively, also intractably local in their nature, that they require different sets of responses and relationships at the local level to address them.


High vacancy numbers and high economic inactivity will be a feature in all local labour markets, but some will have to deal with these as well as persistent and high unemployment among young people and migrant communities as well as care worker shortages and a cost of living crisis that laces itself through each of these.

Among unemployed young people for example, problems of chronic ill health, addiction problems and recent care leavers present challenges that need local Jobcentre Pluses and a range of education, support and training providers to forge those relationships needed to tailor the support necessary for these groups.

We shouldn’t kid ourselves – a lot of the time these relationships simply don’t exist, a reality which itself raises another popularised phrase: the ‘postcode lottery’.

National services themselves are broken into different regional contracts and there are different governance arrangements in different parts of the country (e.g. Unitary, Two Level Local Authorities, City Regional Structures with different devolution deals) (see the 2022 LGA Report [Work Local](#)). This means that local responses sometimes do and sometimes don’t fill national gaps. Moreover, a standardised promise of support when in economic need is easy to conflate with citizen expectations from a national welfare state.

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We would like to emphasise therefore the importance of those relationships at the local level. Local JCPs, local councils, schools and colleges, training providers, local employers and the third sector are part of this patchwork of organisations that make job matching work for those that need it.

Recent debates around employer activation (Valizade et al. 2022) have threatened to change the way we think about employers' needs and responsibilities. Long running debates concerning Universal Credit (see Fawcett, this issue) also pose questions about how the benefits system joins up with pressing and expensive healthcare needs of both jobseekers and the economically inactive.

The tensions we highlight here between the potential promise and risks of localism, have bedevilled a range of passing policy agendas. The 'levelling up' agenda and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund that spearheads it, re-elevated the role of local government, an often overlooked actor in the employability space but one that has a crucial role in linking employability with local skills, education and healthcare resources to address needs in local areas.

But this agenda has attracted criticism for being subject to counter-intuitive political interference and is labelled by some as clearly insufficient. Before Levelling Up, of course, we had the 'Northern Powerhouse' and the devolving of skills policy to new Combined Mayoral authorities of city regions.

The creation of this new layer of government in between local and national government adds a new complication to an already complex local-national nexus with national regimes for employability commissioning and benefits co-existing with the multitude of local policies and arrangements alluded to above. There is no doubt however that city-regional devolution offers enormous opportunities, particularly to integrate employment and skills policy.

In this issue of the IEP Journal, we offer a space to the many sorts of organisations raised above from our own county of West Yorkshire. This includes the local government sector as well as a contribution from our friends at the West Yorkshire Combined Authority who have been developing their relatively new policy powers in the area of skills and employment. We are also pleased to provide space for the voice of the

third sector from West Yorkshire and colleagues from Leeds Trinity University. As well as contributions from other parts of the UK.

Emphasising the story from 'our local', we start with Sonya Midgely from the West Yorkshire Combined Authority. Midgely describes an exciting city-regional approach to join up thinking and ensure that there is a shared approach across the sub-region.

She describes five local authority 'Employment Hubs' in which DWP, City Region and local councils work together to provide an 'example of the converging powers of a Combined Authority'.

While the politics are currently behind localism, it is useful to build an evidence base to sustain a business case that localised employment support works. She cites evaluation data that shows more than 1000 new employers and jobseekers were supported, with a net spend of just over £8m delivering more than £47m of economic benefit. Building on this success she makes a claim for further devolution of policy responsibility and funding.

“While the politics are currently behind localism, it is useful to build an evidence base to sustain a business case that localised employment support works.”

Two further pieces continue the West Yorkshire focus.

The first comes Simeon Perry who runs the employment programmes for Efficiency North, a social housing-focused social enterprise based in Yorkshire. Simeon outlines the prospects and challenges of the agenda to retrofit social housing stock in the UK.

The prospects of combining the goals of renovating social housing and tackling joblessness among the young (and the economic development that comes from these) with those of our Net Zero pledges are very real. The challenges however very much revolve around employment policy and the employability sector to attract the 350,000 people into retrofit work over the next ten years and link them with the skills needed to hit this number.

The second comes from Martin Green from C&K Careers in West Yorkshire and addresses a thorny problem: impact and value for money. It is not easy, but relatively possible, to track outcomes from employment support; people who get a job after receiving some form of support. But from there on, the process gets trickier. Is ‘any job’ good enough? To say we have a problem with low paid employment in the UK has become very painfully clear. But how to measure employment quality? Is it duration, skill demands, pay, hours etc? All these factors require longer-term measurement. It is widely noted internationally that a lack of long-term measurement may overstate the value of some types of service (e.g. ‘work first’) and understate the value of others (e.g. ‘training’).

Moreover, how to disentangle other potential effects such as ‘deadweight’: an estimation of those who would have got a job (though... any job?) without support and mitigations of this, such as whether job entry is faster than might otherwise been the case. In some cases (e.g. employer recruitment or pay subsidies) this concern can seem like a major waste of precious taxpayers’ money, and even opens up potential for corruption, in some countries.

A related issue is ‘displacement’; perhaps programme participants get a job but they only do so by nudging someone else into unemployment. Again, this could be positive if the overall estimate is that those people go on to get a job anyway but participants (often on the wrong end of inequalities) get one first and stay in work. These are important issues, and though some of the best minds in policy research have tangled with it, its not clear the problems are resolved.

Tristram Hooley provides the second article we have on careers guidance, sometimes the unfortunate twin of Employment Services. The situation is often, if you have a choice and are privileged (e.g. University Graduate making the most of the employability team), you get careers guidance. If you don’t and are at the wrong end of social disadvantage, you get much more disciplinary Employment Services, matched to a very restrictive conditionality-focused welfare state that has drawn wide international criticism for its punitive character.

Hooley comes at this issue from a practitioner perspective and emphasises the need for supportive interactions and matching to the service user’s own aspirations. Hooley’s contribution stems from decades of being at the forefront of international research and evidence on what works in career guidance. Whenever I read his work, I am struck by how similar and yet how far away these two worlds are. These two pieces merit reading in combination and offer much to think about.

To stave off concerns that this is completely Yorkshire focused, we are pleased to provide space for Lesley

Giles – the Director of WorkAdvance. Lesley writes about an important initiative in London that knits together different employment and skills packages from across the capital into a coherent body of provisions, again highlighting the importance and potential of employment and skills being integrated at the local level.

To again trumpet this new alliance between the IEP and Leeds Trinity, we showcase the work of our colleagues at LTU; some of which will hopefully provoke new thinking among IEP Fellows. Professor David Best is a worldwide name in drug, alcohol and other addiction recovery programmes. His work shapes practice in recovery programmes across the UK, Europe, Australia and the US.

He is the originator of the Recovery Capital Measurement tool. If you’ve seen a report claiming a recovery service did or didn’t work, you were probably reading his research or data. We are lucky to have David writing with his collaborator Dr Lisa Webster in the issue and as a colleague at Leeds Trinity, where he heads up the new Centre for Addiction Recovery Research. However, David’s work is rarely used in the context of employment services. This is despite the rather obvious fact that addiction is a major barrier to (full) employment at an individual level and damages households, families and communities too. Further, as he argues in his report, engaging in meaningful activity (work and training being prominent) is absolutely entwined in the recovery journal. This piece is essential reading and a further conversation is far overdue.

We’re also thrilled to introduce you to another colleague of ours from Leeds Trinity, Dean of Knowledge Exchange Claire Newhouse. Claire’s article places today’s debates about the Levelling Up agenda in the context of skills. This also raises however much more fundamental questions about the governing theories and ideologies that have driven thinking about employment and skills problems and how local action is understood within this.

This article discusses how localism can lend itself to better personalised support, but also those tensions between theories of economic productivity that have driven policy agendas for so long and human capital theory, the latter of which has been used more as a rhetorical device but is nonetheless subordinated to productivity goals.

Robyn Fawcett comes next. Her careful longitudinal research with mainly women parents on Universal Credit spanned repeated interviews during the Covid 19 pandemic. Her work offers an insight into the challenges faced by parents who were often working, studying or desperately trying to work to support their families. These were far from the 'welfare queens' of TV poverty porn.

She unearthed consistent themes. Her participants experience unemployment for a variety of reasons (including mental and physical health problems, domestic violence and insufficient pay). They encountered UC at a moment of crisis and the experience either caused or exacerbated low level mental health problems for some, and very serious ones for others. Her research adds the personal story to other work (CITE) that demonstrates this issue in quantitative numbers. They were often made ill by complex administration systems that they felt were unhelpful, as well as perceived stigma and even the campaigning efforts of those trying to make their experience better by challenging government policy. Sometimes 'horror stories' read in news media or online discussion portals entrenched the problem.

She identifies simple, obvious and sensible solutions: expand high-quality childcare, ensuring a consistent and high-quality service user experience with accurate and timely information, thinking about the wider issues experienced by young parents and supporting small businesses to engage in employing people they share affinities with.

Last comes Nunn. Nunn's work has shaped, evaluated and explored different systems of employment support in the UK, across Europe and now Latin America and the Caribbean. He is about to launch a world-wide survey of Public Employment Services (e.g. Jobcentre Plus), working with collaborators at the OECD, Inter-American Development Bank and World Association of Public Employment Services.

His contribution echoes and develops themes from his 2021 paper on reshaping employment services around partnerships for the European Commission. In some ways the principles for reform he sets out are ambitious and highly conceptual. In others they are simply obvious and practical.

We'd love to hear what you think about this and all the other pieces in this issue. It's been a pleasure to work with the IEP and we look forward to further collaboration to support and promote the vital work that you – their members – do in local communities up and down the country.



THE LAUNCH OF THE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE IEP AND LEEDS TRINITY UNIVERSITY

We are thrilled to be invited to edit this issue of the IEP journal. We are particularly excited to use this platform to announce the formation of a new strategic partnership between Leeds Trinity University and the IEP.

This is a hugely important moment: we face unprecedented labour market challenges, a still rampant cost of living crisis, a housing market in flux and - with all this – a still looming recession. There is unlikely to be a better time for employability professionals and all employment services practitioners to forge closer links with those in the university sector committed to high-quality research and employment services and policy.

This new strategic partnership between the IEP and LTU brings together these two realms of expertise. This work will start in earnest. In the meantime, we hope you enjoy these contributions collected for this issue of the IEP journal.



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Professor Alex Nunn recently became the first ever **Dean of Research at Leeds Trinity University** and has **20 years of experience in academic and applied social policy research and consultancy.**

He has produced more than 80 research outputs and generated research grant income of more than £3.5m. He regularly works with governments and international organisations to use evidence to help shape policy and practice, including the UK government, Council of Europe, European Commission, and Inter-American Development Bank.

Before joining Leeds Trinity University, Professor Nunn was the Founding Director of the Centre for Social, Cultural and Legal Research at the University of Derby and responsible for REF Unit 20 (Social Policy and Social Work).

He was previously Director of the Policy Research Institute, Head of Politics and Applied Global Ethics, and Founding Director of the Centre for Applied Social Research at Leeds Beckett University.

Dr Andrew Morton recently joined the **Research Office at Leeds Trinity University** after working as a **labour market policy researcher.**

His research interests and published works centre upon employment and healthcare policy with his current research activity being set around employment services in the international perspective.

He has held a Research Fellow role in global health at the University of Leeds and has provided consultancy on a range of policy subjects beyond health and employment policy, including competition policy and EU law.

MAKING DEVOLUTION WORK FOR CITY REGIONS: THE EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS STORY FROM WEST YORKSHIRE



Employment and skills have perhaps been the staple feature of the city-regional 'devo deals' over the last ten years.

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Despite rhetorical commitments of national governments on this front, there are a number of challenges and complications beyond funding and powers needing to be higher and greater.

In broad terms, integrating newly devolved (and developing) employment and skills policies with a still nationally-set benefits regime, nationally-commissioned employment programmes and DfE education and skills policies places demands on newly created combined authorities.

We welcome this opportunity to write for this issue of the IEP Journal and to support the work of the newest University in our region - Leeds Trinity. This article will look at those areas where combined authorities can use its powers as well as address those areas where devolution can work better.

SUPPORTING OUR RESIDENTS THROUGH DEVOLUTION

The West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) came into existence in 2014, but really came to the forefront of citizens' minds in the county with the election of its first Mayor – Tracy Brabin – in 2021. Whether it be through quality training

and guidance, in-work progress and development or accessing the wide range of various support, our mission at WYCA has been to forge programmes and policies that can ensure everyone in our region has their employment ambitions supported. The devolution of both powers and funding related to skills is critical to achieving this mission.

Devolved powers and funding mean greater control, the ability to quickly respond to emerging trends in the labour market and the flexibility so that interventions can be targeted at the groups or sectors that need it most. Devolution also provides critical convening powers for an elected Mayor.

This gives us greater scope to work with regional partners who know our communities best, drawing on expertise and insight from across the region to ensure fair and equitable support for residents. Each of these will be critical to driving innovative approaches to supporting employment and skills development.

EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT AND DEVOLVED POWERS

WYCA's employment support programme is a strong example

of how the convening powers of a Combined Authority can shape delivery. Employment Hubs are delivered in each of our five Local Authority areas, with the network coordinated centrally by WYCA, working closely with colleagues at Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), and other partners to coordinate the regional offer.

As such, interventions can be delivered in community settings to meet participant needs, and draw on local employment needs, whilst central coordination at a West Yorkshire level ensures resources are maximised efficiently. Local delivery enhances the opportunity to align employment support with other local provision. Brands and services that are trusted by and known to service users, such as charity or community groups, often function as delivery partners.

This ensures support can be delivered in settings that are familiar to service users, thus better meeting their needs.

Employment and Skills



“WYCA’s employment support programme is a strong example of how the convening powers of a Combined Authority can shape delivery. Employment Hubs are delivered in each of our five Local Authority areas, with the network coordinated centrally by WYCA, working closely with colleagues at Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), and other partners to coordinate the regional offer.”

Devolved funding has been critical to ensuring this network of employment support in West Yorkshire is maintained.

Devolved funding will also help bridge the gap between the soon-to-be-ceased European Social Funding and the introduction of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Consistency and long-termism in funding ensures stability for those receiving support.

This points to those relationships forged between combined authorities and the DWP. Productive and collaborative ways of working, as we have forged with the DWP at WYCA, must become innate to the devolution model.

This collaborative approach is essential and must be maintained to allow for joined-up responses to emerging areas of skills need, to help ensure the future economy is equipped with the appropriate skills to drive growth. There are some specific examples of how devolved powers are used. Gainshare funding was sourced in order to maintain employment support services.

WYCA has set more ambitious targets with regards to supporting those at greatest risk of becoming NEET as well as others under-represented in the labour market. As Table 1 (Page 10) illustrates, these ambitious targets result in better engagement with, and more support offered to, ethnic minority groups and those with disabilities.

The results speak for themselves – when evaluated, the Combined Authority’s first phase employment support programme is estimated to have achieved a gross economic impact of approximately £47.3m, against a spend of £8.3m.

Individuals engaged through the Mayoral regional employment support programme are offered personalised employment support and walked through their journey towards work or in work.

This includes support to retrain and gain new skills through devolved adult skills provision, based on labour market information and regular dialogue with local employers. As such, provision reacts flexibly to the employment/skills needs of an individual, whilst ensuring the wider skills needs of the economy are being met, and that skills-related vacancies are being considered at every stage.

SUPPORTING ADULT LEARNERS

The Employment Hub network isn't the only tool at our disposal. Devolution of the Adult Education Budget (AEB) was agreed as part of West Yorkshire's 2020 Devolution deal, meaning that over £65m per year will be entrusted to the Combined Authority.

Devolution on this scale gives WYCA additional levers to set regional priorities for funding, aligned with opportunities and skills needs in the local economy. Access to adult skills offer is integrated with the employment support offer, with local intelligence from business and communities feeding back to the future commissioning of programmes. The first full year of delivery for devolved AEB funding shows how effectively devolved funding can be appropriately diverted to help those who need it most.

In Year 1 (2021-22): 43,000 learners across West Yorkshire were supported, an increase of 6% on previous years. Of these learners, 8,700 residents were supported to attain their first ever qualification – representing an important step on their employment journey.

Moreover, we saw marked improvements with our disabled jobseekers and those from deprived neighbourhoods. Moreover, on this same inclusion goal, 52% of West Yorkshire learners were from a non-

white ethnic minority background, compared to 34% nationally. The impact of devolution on the AEB provider network across West Yorkshire has been profound.

Prior to devolution, more than half the providers in West Yorkshire supported fewer than 20 learners. In the first year of devolved AEB funding, only one provider in West Yorkshire had fewer than 20 learners, with 80% of providers supporting 100 or more learners. By trimming the total number of AEB providers from 260 to 38, WYCA has brought a streamlined landscape for learners, prioritising quality over quantity from the provider network.

“We saw marked improvements with our disabled jobseekers and those from deprived neighbourhoods. Moreover, on this same inclusion goal, 52% of West Yorkshire learners were from a non-white ethnic minority background, compared to 34% nationally.”

Through Gainshare funding, a range of support has been made available for those in West Yorkshire interested in starting up their own business. Again, the flexibility of devolved funding has allowed this support to be targeted amongst communities and groups that most need it. 60% of those who have accessed enterprise support in West Yorkshire are female. This is hugely encouraging given recent findings that stated women are half as likely as men to start their own business.¹

36.5% of those accessing enterprise support are from ethnic minority backgrounds, as a result of working closely with community groups and advocates to ensure access to support is made available to all. Devolved powers and funding give us the flexibility to design and deliver programmes in a way that better meets the needs of previously under-represented groups.

EMERGING SKILLS FOR A FUTURE ECONOMY

Our regional economy boasts industries in healthtech, manufacturing, digital (particularly fin-tech and creative digital) and hosts the biggest regional financial centre outside of London. Opportunities to support high tech growth as well as digital and emerging technologies are also critical to meeting our net-zero

Table 1: Employment Hub engagement figures

	Total Starts	Ethnic Minority	% of Total	Disability	% of Total
ESF Employment Hub 1 (Jan 2019-December 2021)	5915	2060	34.8%	1137	19.2%
Gainshare Employment Hub 2 (June 2021 to March 2023)	6774	3455	51.0%	1462	21.6%
TOTAL	12689	5515	43.5%	2599	20.5%

¹ The Rose Review of Female Entrepreneurship, p.7.

ambitions. This itself demands an employment and skills system with strong local and regional policies and powers.

Devolution has allowed combined authorities like ours to focus resources on our emerging skills agenda in a variety of ways. The Local Digital Skills Partnership (LDSP), secured through our devolution deal, has brought together senior stakeholders at the national, regional and sub-regional level to tackle stubborn issues around recruitment, retention and digital skills shortages.

Similarly, the Mayor's Green Jobs Taskforce has brought together a strong coalition of employers, education & training providers, third-sector organisations and, most importantly, residents. This coalition has identified key recommendations for our regional skills system to respond flexibly to emerging needs around green skills.

For these coalitions to be effective however there needs to be sufficient and well targeted funding. This must incorporate:

- Inclusive interventions designed to support the 25% of adult residents in Yorkshire that lack Essential Digital Skills for Life, and to ensure everyone in West Yorkshire benefits from a Just Transition.
- Support for individuals to access relevant labour market information so they can make informed choices on career pathways in an emerging economy
- Encourage and engage employers support those in work by investing in the skills they need to be productive, as well as attracting new talent.
- Ensuring Further Education colleges across West Yorkshire to have the capacity and infrastructure to deliver necessary skills interventions for the development of emerging skills needs.

It is critically important that combined authorities support employers in the areas of skills, recruitment to fill vacancies and retention. Again, devolved powers and funding are key

to ensuring that this support is flexible and responsive. Using our Skills for Growth programme as a blueprint, future skills support for businesses allows us to better focus on sectoral areas of need, and to ensure that our SME business community has access to high level talent.

Similarly, our Levy Transfer offer allows for the redistribution of unspent apprenticeship levy funding to be utilized by smaller employers to attract, retain, retrain and upskill apprentices within their organisation.

Further flexibility over apprenticeship funds would allow money to be spent on other forms of training/upskilling, supporting business growth as well as raising the skill level of in-work residents of West Yorkshire.

Regionally convened partnerships on emerging skills trends and needs continue to provide abundant opportunities to develop meaningful relationships with central government; these will be key in informing future devolution asks for the region. Again, devolved powers and funding give us the flexibility to respond to emerging trends in the employment & skills landscape.

FUTURE DEVOLUTION & TRAILBLAZER DEALS

The successes of West Yorkshire as a result of devolution have spurred the demand for more devolution in the region. WYCA has been selected by the government for one of its forthcoming 'Trailblazer' Devolution deals and welcomes the heightened convening powers and the stability this would bring to the funding landscape. Crucially, Trailblazer Devolution deals can lead to innovative approaches to upskilling residents.

There is still much to do, however. It is crucial that combined authorities keep looking for new ways to use convening powers to ensure residents are empowered in all areas of their lives.

Many face significant barriers to stable, well paid employment that are not always directly related to their level of education or training; barriers like long-term health conditions or

prior convictions or incarceration. As we seek further devolved powers and funding, combined authorities need to use these powers to work with partners like the NHS or HMPPS to offer holistic support services to help our residents to find the best employment situation for their needs.

Additionally, flexibility in commissioning activity like DfE Bootcamps or the National Careers Service would allow for more comprehensive responses to local labour market needs. The employment support ecosystem has many moving parts and can sometimes seem overwhelming to the customers it serves.

Ensuring the system works toward a common goal is critical to supporting people towards better employment. The employment support eco-system sees little power rest at the local level. Devolving powers around these larger programmes would ensure resources could be used better to reduce barriers to employment for local residents.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sonya Midgley is the Employment and Skills Lead for the West Yorkshire Combined Authority and the Leeds City Region Enterprise Partnership (LEP).

Prior to Sonya's role at the West Yorkshire Combined Authority, Sonya had held similar roles advancing employment and skills policy at local government level as well as in the private sector.

NET ZERO, JOBS FOR THE YOUNG AND MAKING USE OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISE: PREPARING FOR RETROFIT TRAINING IN YORKSHIRE



For those working in the field of employability the term, skills crisis, will be a bit hackneyed. However, the requirement to decarbonise the residential housing stock provides both many opportunities as well as challenges for the employability sector.

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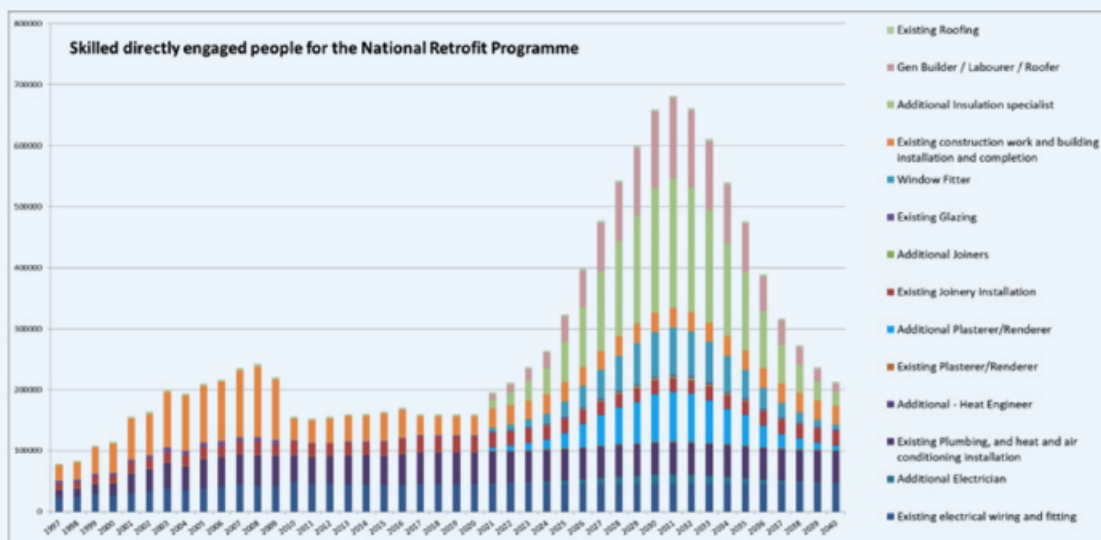
[LinkedIn.com/simeonperry](https://www.linkedin.com/company/simeonperry)

Let's start with some facts. The construction workforce employs 2.69m people across 342,000 companies.

This equates to 7% of the UK employed workforce. Of this, two-thirds are PAYE, with the vast majority in SMEs; one third of the sector is self-employed. The sector currently has 45,000 vacancies. Using current construction methods, the industry needs to increase its workforce by 350,000 FTE workers over the next decade to deliver the volume of buildings' retrofit work needed to reach Net Zero 2050.

This is an increase to the sector of 102%. This means the sector needs to prioritise attracting young people into the sector, new recruitment from outside the sector, undertake retraining and ensure productivity gains, to have a realistic chance to meet the decarbonisation goals. The chart below shows the employment requirement for delivering decarbonisation in buildings. Furthermore, a wide range of roles are required across the construction sector from a variety of technical, professional, manufacturing and support sector roles. Generally, each role requires an employment and skills

pathway and accredited qualifications. To support the residential sector become decarbonised, the social housing sector is undertaking significant amounts of investment. The Department of Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) has provided £6.5Bn of funding for the next 2 years. Social Housing has been directly allocated £3.8Bn until 2031, with eligibility through other DESNZ funding pots for a further £1bn. In addition, social housing providers are also using their own funding from rental income and borrowing to supplement the available DESNZ grant funding.



Source: CITB



“The industry needs to increase its workforce by 350,000 FTE workers over the next decade to deliver the volume of buildings’ retrofit work needed to reach Net Zero 2050. This is an increase to the sector of 102%. This means the sector needs to prioritise attracting young people into the sector, new recruitment from outside the sector, undertake retraining and ensure productivity gains, to have a realistic chance to meet the decarbonisation goals.”

The Social Housing Regulator requires all social housing to meet the Energy Performance Certificate Rating of ‘C’ by 2030. Whilst this level will improve the energy efficiency of homes, it will not decarbonise the stock which will require further work post 2030. To meet EPC C level in West Yorkshire, estimates suggest that there may need to be £3.6Bn of investment. The delivery of this investment will be a herculean task to ensure that there is an appropriately trained skilled workforce.

Efficiency North is a not-for-profit company owned by its 55 social housing provider members that collectively own 700,000 homes. At the heart of Efficiency North is an aim to collaborate with social housing providers in the North of England to provide housing maintenance frameworks that enable the regeneration of social housing communities, whilst also maximising the provision of employment and skills opportunities.

Efficiency North is the only social housing owned regional procurement framework provider in the region. It provides both frameworks and a Flexi Job Apprenticeship scheme, as well as having a charity arm that supports the development of Employment and Skills.

To date, Efficiency North has supported 450 people through its Flexi Job apprentice scheme, enabled over 500 apprentices directly through contractors as well as enabled over 1,000 people to be construction work ready in the Humber region through its bespoke Humber Construction Hub, based in Hull.

Efficiency North wants to support the social housing sector prepare to decarbonise its stock by providing the best opportunities to its social housing provider members. It already provides procurement solutions for 21 social housing provider partners. As it aims high, it wants to learn from and shape national good practice.

That is why it is a founding member of the [National Retrofit Hub](#), the Construction Leadership Council endorsed vehicle supporting UK retrofit delivery. Furthermore, Efficiency North seeks to be both a regional placeshaper as well as in due course to deliver training provision to benefit our member social housing providers.

Retraining and upskilling the existing construction workforce will not provide the sufficient numbers that the sector needs to deliver retrofit. A significant number of new entrants will be needed to support the sector. Young people and career changes will need to be enticed to the sector. Social housing providers serve communities where there are significant low levels of skills and worklessness. As a result, many social housing providers as leading local anchor bodies now have employability teams to support their resident base, providing a range of training provision and support engaging with their communities and stakeholders in innovative ways. The retrofit agenda for social housing provides significant opportunities for social housing providers directly to influence the FE training provision through its procurement requirements in contracts to both upskill and develop new training pathways for new entrants to the construction sector.

To meet this challenge, Efficiency North is currently developing a coalition of the key stakeholders in West Yorkshire to develop training pathways that will not only upskill the current workforce in the required retrofit skills but entice new entrants into the sector to meet the new skills that retrofit will create. Efficiency North is bringing the leading local representative bodies: West Yorkshire Housing Partnership and West Yorkshire Consortium of Colleges and leading construction industry bodies together to maximise the significant investment retrofit will bring to enable the construction sector supply chain to employ skilled staff to deliver the work. This collaborative coalition is in the early stages of forming, with some initial research being undertaken to assess both the stock investment required, the resulting financial requirements for each social housing provider and then the skills needed to deliver such investment. Through the Partnership the vision is to

A) Develop training pathways to, in particular support residents from social housing communities prepare for the world of work supported by the social housing provider employment teams and other locally based providers

B) Enable local FE provision to provide a range of construction related courses that support the variety of retrofit skills for both new entrants and shorter upskilling courses to train the existing and new entrants through career changes into the sector.

To ensure that residential housing is retrofitted to a consistently high standard, a national specification called PAS 2035 has been developed that combines both technical and occupancy comfort standards. To meet this standard, a number of new roles have been created, each requiring new qualifications.

There is a significant national and regional shortage of people trained in these roles. Efficiency North has partnered with training providers to support its member social housing providers upskill their staff to be PAS compliant, maximising the opportunity provided from recent DESNZ funding.

To begin to decarbonise the housing stock, social housing providers are generally insulating properties first with an aim to then install mechanical heating systems such as heat pumps at a later date. In addition, there is currently a drive to install solar panels as this can immediately reduce the energy costs which are a significant contributor to the cost of living crisis. In terms of insulation, the sector has already installed loft and cavity wall insulation. They have also fitted condensing boilers to most properties that can have such measures. Deeper retrofits are now needed.

Half of the UK stock of the 8 million solid wall properties require further insulation. These properties need either internal or external wall insulation. Social housing has many solid wall properties built in the 1960s and 1970s. In Yorkshire, social housing providers are making a significant investment in undertaking External Wall Insulation. Through the Social Housing Decarbonation Fund provided by DESNZ, Efficiency North has enabled £40m of framework spend for its member social housing providers in 2023 – 2025. Much of this funding is to be spent on External Wall Insulation.

However, there is very little training provision for Insulation and Building Treatment (IBT) in the UK. This is recognised by the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) and the sector's trade bodies. Whilst in England an NVQ is available, there is no Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IATF) recognised apprenticeship standard for IBT. The only training provision has been through private providers supported by small amounts of DESNZ grants and commercial training. In Yorkshire there is currently no IBT training provision by either FE provision or by private sector providers. The training provision in Scotland is markedly better than that in both England and Wales, with both apprenticeship standards and FE college delivery in this field.

“There is very little training provision for Insulation and Building Treatment (IBT) in the UK... Whilst in England an NVQ is available, there is no Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IATF) recognised apprenticeship standard for IBT.”

Knowing the forthcoming huge investment pipeline and the lack of direct training in Yorkshire, Efficiency North through its charity arm EN:Able Communities sought to ensure there was the provision of some training. The charity approached two leading insulation based trade bodies: the [Insulation and Cladding Association](#) (INCA) and the [National Insulation Association](#) (NIA) as well as the [Solid Wall Insulation Guarantee Authority](#) (SWIGA). It then invited [Leeds College of Building](#) to develop and deliver a curriculum for a short unaccredited course, enabling current operatives to be upskilled. This course will commence in September 2023, for the new academic year.



The vision is to develop a training pathway enabling contractors to upskill their operatives through onsite experience and high quality FE delivered classroom based practice. Following graduation from this course, operatives will be able to undertake their L3 NVQ in IBT, assessed by local FE colleges. In doing so, they will then become PAS 2035 compliant, a requirement for all public sector commissioned works.

As a result of this course, it is hoped that further FE providers will then provide similar courses over the next few years. The IBT IATE approved apprenticeship is expected to start from 2025. That will then provide a more formal route into the sector.

INCA have been instrumental in ensuring that best practice is shared to support the emerging training environment in wall insulation. In particular, lessons have been learnt from Scottish providers from both Industry and FE. The work in Yorkshire is not unique. Elsewhere in England industry and colleges are working together to provide training for the sector in Exeter, South Gloucestershire and Derby.

The challenge to decarbonise the residential housing stock has only just begun in earnest. Through its passion to regenerate communities, organisations like ours in the social enterprise sector can be leaders in enabling change.

This can provide pathways for the employability sector to provide appropriate and high quality training for the sector at a cost effective price. To date whilst small steps have been made with our partners in Yorkshire, we recognise that this is the beginning of a journey that will transform the lives of social housing residents and increase the skills capacity to deliver retrofit works.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Simeon Perry leads EN:Able Communities CIO – the charity arm of Efficiency North, a charity focused on providing Retrofit training and energy advice enabling those living in social housing with social mobility.

Efficiency North is a not-for-profit company owned by its 55 social housing providers members. Efficiency North collaborates with social housing providers in the North of England to enable the regeneration of social housing communities alongside maximising the provision of employment and skills opportunities. Through Simeon's work,

Efficiency North have also just won the right to deliver an Energy Advice project in Sheffield from DESNZ to provide energy advice to home owners in council estates. Simeon previously worked in social housing in local government for 25 years at Leeds and York councils.

CAREERS GUIDANCE AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN WEST YORKSHIRE



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This article examines the role that high quality, independent careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) plays in supporting the delivery of effective employment programmes.

It also makes the case for Local Authorities to be the central, commissioning and leadership body in spatial systems that produce good employment outcomes for their residents – especially those who face additional challenges in the labour market.

The arguments put forward to substantiate these two assertions are firstly informed by the bias of the author. I am currently the Chief Executive of a CEIAG provider operating across West Yorkshire and have spent a significant part of my career working in and with Local Authorities to deliver good employment and skills outcomes. Secondly, they draw upon research, evaluation and significant employment and skills policy developments that have sought to identify the contributory factors to a productive and outcomes based employment support system. Thirdly and most importantly, the arguments are supported by customer experience and feedback.

This latter point pertaining to the customer experience, being the most important, is our starting point. My personal view, formed over many years, is that billions of pounds have been squandered by successive governments, agencies and funding

streams on supporting people into work who would have found work anyway. This “deadweight” is well evidenced in multiple evaluations and has been the source of great revenue for organisations who have been incentivised to “cherry pick” the “low hanging fruit”. Payment by results programmes have had mixed results in supporting those customers whose journey to employment is not linear and does not comprise of a few, final steps. Feedback from customers regularly emphasises the importance that, key worker, plays in building confidence, trust and support.

The importance of professional, qualified and consistent one to one support is at the heart of this approach and was referenced in the evaluation of the West Yorkshire Employment Hubs (May 2022) as a critical success factor particularly for those people whose journey to work was more complex and challenging. Multiple studies and policy papers have pointed to the confusing, fragmented and complex array of funding to support the development of active labour market and skill programmes. The nature of these programmes have often resulted in: the displacement of support for those who need it most; limited return on investment; and little evidence of positive impact

upon employment rates and upon the economic fortunes of those people whose lives have been blighted by long-term unemployment.

That said, there are many examples of successful programmes and outstanding good practice from agencies and individuals. It is my view that these programmes have often been designed and delivered outside of a national, prescribed approach. It is also my view that factors that contribute to their success include a combination of the following components:

- Programmes are targeted at those who need most support and have sufficient timescales to ensure that change and progress can be made;
- The intervention is designed and delivered in the local context with multiple partners and end users enabled to shape and influence the activity to be supported;
- The intervention starts from the needs and wants of the customer – not the agencies delivering the support and certainly not to a prescribed list of eligible activities;



- Performance and payment is incentivised to long-term outcomes and the achievement of progress towards them;
- Customers are given as many chances as they need to make progress and delivery bodies are encouraged to never give up on a customer;
- Activity is commissioned and delivered locally by organisations that are trusted and committed to the local area. Delivery bodies are integrated within the local labour market support system and are funded so that they can provide a consistent key worker approach to customers and employers;
- Customers can expect to be treated with kindness, respect, care and patience and can develop a relationship with the same key worker who has their best interests at heart; and finally
- The Local Authority is actively engaged in the programme (either as deliverer, commissioner, enabler or a combination thereof) and has oversight of the arrangements for performance management, accountability and partnership integration of the programme. Where required, the Local Authority

can intervene to bring about better outcomes.

This latter and very important point brings me on to the role of Local Authorities in the Employment and Skills landscape and why I believe they are fundamental to long-term success. Local Authorities (and Combined Authorities where they exist) provide consistency in terms of spatial planning, leadership and democratic accountability. Their statutory duties and obligations require them to provide the arrangements for children and young people to be prepared effectively for adulthood and to be engaged in positive labour market activity and particularly those who face additional challenges. Their economic duties require them to effectively understand the local labour market and ensure that businesses have the support to thrive and grow including having ready access to a pool of talent.

Moreover, their statutory roles in: spatial planning; their strategic leadership of communities, public health, child and adult welfare; their role in preventing and tracking youth unemployment; and their understanding of the voluntary and community sector means they are best placed to integrate and maximise the outcomes from employment

and skills activity. Additionally, the democratic accountability means that residents and stakeholders can directly affect decisions taken and policies followed.

“Local Authorities (and Combined Authorities where they exist) provide consistency in terms of spatial planning, leadership and democratic accountability. Their statutory duties and obligations require them to provide the arrangements for children and young people to be prepared effectively for adulthood and to be engaged in positive labour market activity and particularly those who face additional challenges.”

In West Yorkshire (where my organisation predominantly operates and where I have spent the best part of 20 years operating), the five local authorities have and continue to play a key role in the planning, commissioning and delivery of employment and skills support to support a functioning labour market. A history of collaboration between the LAs has grown as a result of:

- The porous nature of their boundaries and the fact that the travel to learn / work patterns of residents are often not co-terminus with their home local authority. In parts of West Yorkshire 85% of the workforce live within 3 miles of their workplace – however this may be in a neighbouring area:
- The draw of Leeds as the employment heart of the region – particularly in the professional services, digital and public service sectors; and
- The emergence of the West Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority, the devolution of some employment and skills funding and the development of regional employment and skills policy and planning.

It is my view, albeit one most likely widely shared, that much of the efforts made by Local Authorities are directed towards two time consuming and unnecessary activities: One, The development of funding bids, in competition with neighbouring authorities, to address challenges in their area; and two, Trying to make sense of a fragmented and confusing national policy and funding regime.

These unnecessary activities were summarised by the LGA in their Work Local campaign. A specific report which formed part of the campaign highlighted the fragmentation arising from the current system. The report identified 49 separate programmes, routed through multiple departments or agencies spending over £20billion per annum.

This disconnect between the abilities and understanding of localities and the prescription and competition at the national level has had a profound economic impact across many Local Authority areas. The Inter-Agency

Working Group on Career Guidance (WGCG), in their 2021 publication “Investing in Career Guidance” estimated that if the UK had the same levels of NEET (young people aged 16-18 not in education, employment or training) as Germany this would increase the size of the economy by £40bn. The LGA Work Local report estimates that in a large combined authority area (like West Yorkshire) 15% more people could be better skilled up (4,200) or in work (3,850) as a result of a localised employment and skills service with effective careers education, information and guidance (CEIAG) at its heart.

This would result in a benefit to the economy of £80m per year and save the taxpayer £52m per year. Wider benefits to health and wellbeing could see a boost to economic benefits amounting up to £260m per year.

Both the work of WGCG and LGA reference CEIAG as being central to this localised system of delivery. I passionately believe this and believe it responds directly to the point made by customers about the importance of qualified, professional consistent one to one support. Moreover, this support must be delivered by qualified careers professionals working at or towards the Level 6 qualification in Careers Guidance. The ability to support customers by equipping them with lifelong careers management skills means that customers not only progress into work, they also have the means to progress in work and secure a meaningful career.

For customers with significant barriers to finding work, specialist careers advisors can facilitate the necessary behaviour, lifestyle and skills changes which eventually remove these barriers and make employment a realistic and achievable outcome.

Aligned to the importance of delivering employment support via qualified careers professionals, it is important that the host organisation is transparent in its performance and open to partnership working to secure the best outcomes for its customers. Rigorous continuation of professional development, a commitment to quality assurance, equity, diversity and

inclusion and external assessment (Ofsted, Matrix etc) are prerequisites for any organisation seeking to support people to gain and progress in employment.

Again, the Inter Agency Working Group on Careers Guidance (Investing in Career Guidance, 2021) make the point most eloquently: “Effective career guidance helps individuals to reach their potential, economies to become more efficient and societies to become fairer. It is critical to the smooth transitions of people as they make choices about education and training and to mobility within the labour market.”

We conclude this article by putting forward the view that we must improve employment support arrangements if we are to address the fundamental and well documented challenges in the labour market. Some of these are beyond the remit of this article and relate to fundamental economic challenges i.e. the economic imbalance between places, cities and regions; the underinvestment in economic infrastructure particularly outside of London and the South East and the impacts of fiscal, economic and political decisions on the economy.

However, there are some decisions that can be taken to improve labour market outcomes and some principles that if enacted will strengthen the infrastructure that supports consistent, high quality delivery. These are:

- A central role for local authorities in the planning, commissioning, oversight and delivery of programmes;
- Co-production of integrated employment and skills strategies between local authorities and combined authorities with funding directed to the priorities identified by local authorities;
- A redirection of focus of funding from short-term outputs to long-term outcomes and a commitment to provide support tailored to the needs of customers; and
- Long-term funding which supports investment in sustainable delivery



infrastructure in local areas and provides the levels of funding which promote high quality, professional, qualified careers practice.

The 'central role' for local authorities described above is complicated in an area with a Combined Authority as well. This can however become an enormous advantage if the right relationships and policy and resource sharing are got right.

This does not just concern the relationships between local and combined authorities, but also the relationship between both of these and national government, the DWP and its JCP network. We are still in the early stages of this 'city-devo' experiment, so it's important we get these relationships and systems correct now.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Martin Green is the Chief Executive of C+K Careers – a non-for profit company working on employment and careers and is jointly owned by both Calderdale and Kirklees Councils in West Yorkshire.

Martin has worked in West Yorkshire for 30 years having trained as a teacher here 32 years ago. He lives in Leeds, grew up in Burnley and believes the North of England is the greatest place on Earth.

Martin has vast experience of the employment, skills and careers world and has an extensive background in local and regional skills policy and programmes. He is passionate about equity, diversity and inclusion and believes everybody has the right to get the support that will help them achieve their aspirations.

IMAGINE IF CAREER GUIDANCE AND EMPLOYABILITY COULD JOIN FORCES



As employability professionals you are probably aware of the existence of the National Careers Service and the wider world of career guidance.

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Career guidance professionals work with clients to help them to manage their life, learning and work, to develop and articulate their skills and to make career decisions and transitions.

They work with people of all ages and stages in life and use a wide variety of different techniques and approaches to help people. Given this description you might be forgiven for exclaiming 'but, that's what I do!' There is a lot of ink spilt on the differences between employability work and career guidance, but there is certainly a strong case to make that they are at least very similar activities if not just versions of the same thing.

Both are about working with clients, customers or students to help them to make positive steps in learning and work, both are usually (but not always) funded by the government and both can often be heard decrying the fact that their work is undervalued and poorly understood.

In this article I want to reflect on what employability professionals can learn from career guidance and to argue that the best way forwards for the two professions would be to come much closer together.

LESSONS FROM THE EVIDENCE

Career guidance received a substantial blow in 2010-2011 when funding was withdrawn from the youth-focused Connexions service. At this point Michael Gove, who was Education Secretary at the time, challenged the careers sector to provide evidence that career guidance works. The sector responded, but the government ploughed on with making its austerity-fuelled cuts.

Since then there has been an enormous effort to develop the evidence for career guidance. We now have much more clarity about the kinds of impacts that career guidance has on individuals' motivation, engagement with work and learning, and ultimately on their career success and lifetime earning potential.

"The evidence says career guidance works." Not my words, but those of Rishi Sunak as he promised funding for the National Careers Service as part of his post-pandemic 'Plan for Jobs'. Increasingly in the UK and around the world, we are seeing policymakers recognise that career guidance is a critical part of an education and employment system. Of course, funding doesn't always follow rhetoric, but there is a growing recognition that

good career guidance can make a difference.

The evidence also tells us quite a bit about what 'good career guidance' actually is, and most of these lessons also apply to how employability works. I summarise the evidence as follows.

Focus on the individual. To have credibility, career guidance has to serve the interest of the individuals and groups that it is working with. It needs to take a long-term view around the life development of the individual, rather than just focus on the next step. If it is seen as pushing people into outcomes that are only in the interest of the government, the employer or the learning organisation will lose credibility.

At the heart of this is listening carefully to what individuals want and need, attending to their other needs, for example recognising that for many clients their housing needs might need to be solved before they can focus on finding work. This also demands we understand the diversity of clients and so avoiding a one-size-fits-all approach.



“One-to-one counselling can be a powerful approach, but so too can work in groups, experiential learning (often involving employers and work experience), online learning, mentoring, peer support and so on. Indeed, the evidence suggests that career guidance is often most effective when multiple approaches are combined in a thoughtful and progressive way.”

Support learning and progression.

Career guidance is primarily a learning activity through which individuals learn about themselves and the world around them and come to a decision about where they want to fit into the world. To support this career guidance professionals need to be able to articulate what career management skills they are trying to develop and engage their clients in this development.

They also need to recognise that this learning can be achieved in a wide variety of ways. One-to-one counselling can be a powerful approach, but so too can work in groups, experiential learning (often involving employers and work experience), online learning, mentoring, peer support and so on. Indeed, the evidence suggests that career guidance is often most effective when multiple approaches are combined in a thoughtful and progressive way.

Ensure quality. Finally, it is important that we attend to the quality of what is done. At the heart of this are qualified professionals (typically trained to degree or postgraduate level), making use of up-to-date and reliable information and resources. There is also value in a variety of forms of quality assurance of practice including peer observation and feedback, external reviews and measurement of outcomes.

REFERRAL AND CO-WORKING

The summary of the evidence above sets out some of what we know about effective career guidance. Most of it will be relevant to employability professionals, although as employability professionals there is typically more pressure on you to hit

targets established by funders which can distract from the focus on the individual. There is also typically less focus on professional qualifications and training.

Given this, it is important to recognise that career guidance professionals, in the National Careers Service or elsewhere, may have the opportunity to work with the clients that you work with in different ways.

This is why it is important to reach out to careers professionals and discuss appropriate approaches to cross-referral. Where your clients have more complex need or where their career aspirations are more specialised, referral to a careers professional is likely to be the best option.

In general people's lives are rarely neatly divided into the boxes identified through government funding arrangements. Employment issues fade into learning and career issues, which in turn are tangled up with benefits, housing and relationships. The most effective approaches require interprofessional working and regular referral.

PROGRESSION INTO CAREER GUIDANCE

As you work with career guidance professionals and see the links between their work and yours, it is likely you'll see considerable overlap between these two worlds. Increasingly, I think we'll see employability professionals and career guidance professionals become part of the same profession. If this is the case we can view career guidance as a potential progression route for employability professionals.

If you enjoy working with people, helping them to figure out their life, work and employment, you might want to engage in further training to become fully qualified as a career guidance professional. The Career Development Institute website has a lot of information about how you can do this through apprenticeship, work-based routes or university degrees.

The idea of career guidance as progression may not make immediate sense when you look at the salaries of careers professionals in the National Careers Service.

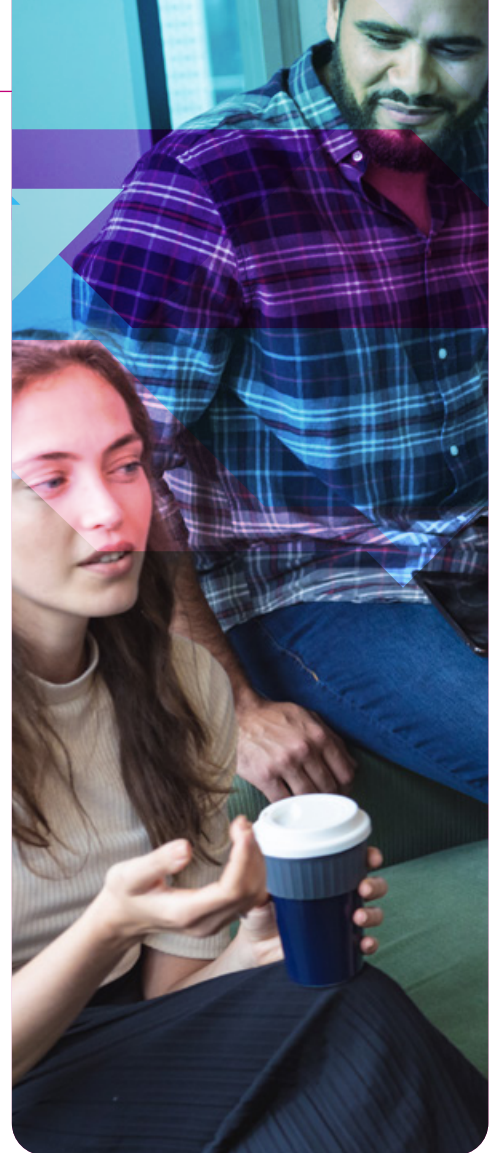
In many cases these jobs will be at a similar salary level to the salaries in the employability sector. But, career guidance is a much bigger world, beyond work with unemployed and low-skilled clients in the National Careers Service, there are also careers professionals working in schools, colleges, universities, businesses, outplacement companies and private practice. Many of these roles command higher salaries and open up more opportunities for progression.

THE NEED FOR A BIGGER TENT

If we accept that employability professionals and career guidance professionals are part of the same broader profession then this has implications for how we organise ourselves. The most effective professions are able to organise people in a variety of roles, working in a variety of different organisational contexts. By doing this and recognising the value that exists across the profession they are better able to share learning and represent their professional interests to employers, government and the general public.

At the moment we are fragmented, focused inwards on our own immediate problems and concerns. In the long run I would like to see us build a much bigger tent of careers and employability professionals. Such an endeavour would see professional associations coming together, a clearer ladder of qualifications and progression and increasing solidarity between professionals working in different contexts. In such a circumstance the profession would have a much greater capability to articulate the importance of the work that it does, and to argue for greater recognition for the professionals doing that work.

You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one...



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tristram Hooley is Professor of Career Education at the University of Derby.

He holds roles as the Director of Research for The Careers & Enterprise Company and Professor II at the Inland University of Applied Science, and Adjunct Professor at the [School of Linguistics, Adult and Specialist Education](#), University of Southern Queensland and is a member of the UK Careers Sector Strategic Alliance.

Tristram is also a Winston Churchill Fellow, a Fellow of [National Institute for Career Education](#) and Counselling (NICEC), sits on the editorial board of the [British Journal of Guidance and Counselling](#) and was a specialist adviser to the House of Commons Education Committee inquiry into career guidance.



WORKFORCE INTEGRATION AND INCLUSION IN LONDON'S LABOUR MARKET



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In 2021, a future Economic Recovery Programme was launched in London. My organisation [Work Advance](#) and the [Institute of Employment Studies](#) were commissioned by the Greater London Authority (GLA) to undertake research for this Programme.

We sought to address the employment and skills crisis facing London's economy following recent economic and social shocks.

This paper discusses the focus of the research, its key findings and how it is being used to enhance what employment, skills and business support services are being delivered in the region.

These are unprecedented times. As local governments have repurposed their local strategies to support economic recovery following the Covid-19 Pandemic, working with businesses and partners in their local areas, they find themselves dealing with further cycles of uncertainty as the new disruptive norm.

The effects of the Ukraine war and cost of living crisis, on the back of Brexit and longer running megatrends such as climate change, and ongoing technological advances, bring significant challenges as well as well as opportunities. Businesses seeking to overcome persistent productivity constraints and performance, find themselves faced with a range of issues - fluctuating customer demand, rising costs, high staff turnover, reverse migration and growing labour and skills shortages. In turn,

Governments wrestle with how to stimulate economic growth and employment prospects and better serve their communities in the face of funding shortfalls made worse by unimaginable levels of national debt following the Pandemic.

In the Greater London Authority (GLA) such steps are seen with the London Recovery Programme (LRP) 2021 which is taking action to support a stronger, long-term recovery and growth in the city.

A key part of the Programme is seeking to work with employers in a number of priority growth sectors - health, green, digital, creative and hospitality. In particular, this aims to better meet evolving industry needs by: enhancing the relevance of skills development and matching services locally; widening access to growing employment opportunities, and fully utilising the skills of a more diverse workforce - this supports a mission to [help more Londoners into good work](#).

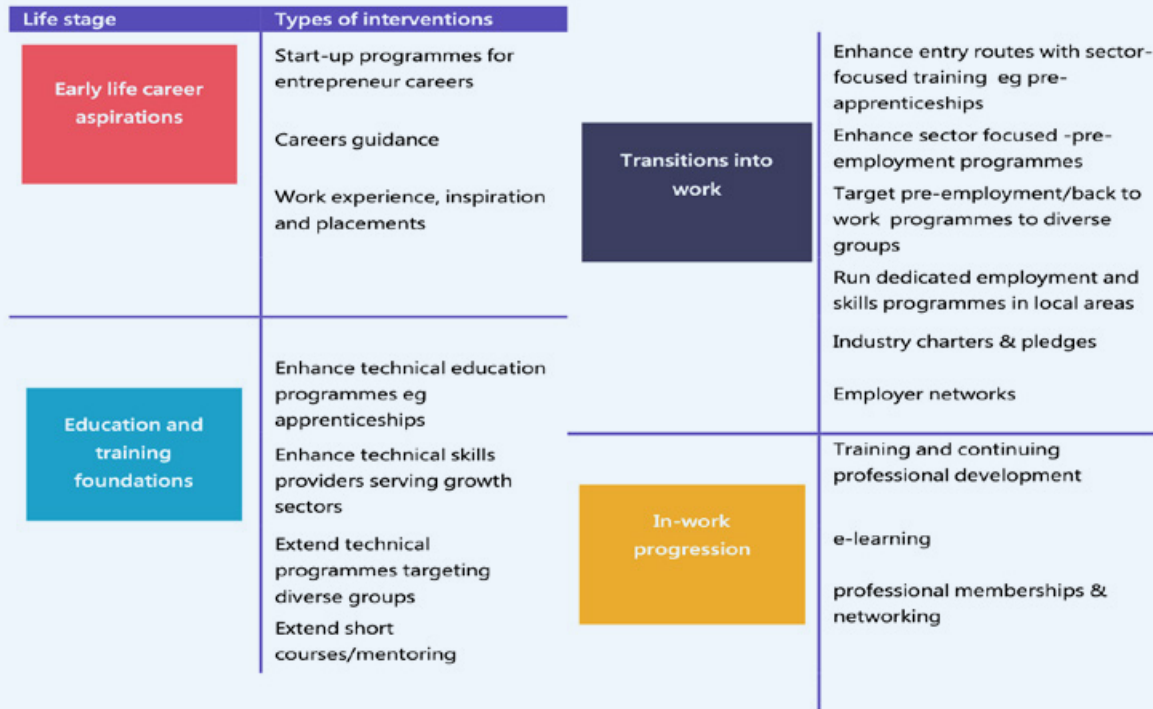
One main objective has been to support Londoners from diverse backgrounds to, get in and on in work, especially those under-represented in growth sectors.

The GLA has a range of existing

employment, skills and business support services that it has already been delivering to improve working practices and widen the opportunities for individuals to access and progress in work. Some of these seek to customise national programmes (such as the Sector Work Based Academies and Work and Health Programmes of DWP and Apprenticeships and the Institutes of Technology from the DfE), but others look to deploy wider funding streams locally such as the Adult Education Budget and European Social Fund. These are enabling a range of local partners involving businesses and providers, and voluntary and community groups within the London ecosystem to enhance the national offer and advance targeted initiatives more responsive to local needs - that is different employer and individual groups.

The LRP provides an opportunity to: take stock following the economic crisis; review what's being done around employment and skills; and consider where additional support is likely to be required for both adults and young people in the workforce in the years ahead. The study conducted by Work Advance and the Institute of Employment Studies has researched the nature and causes of under-representation within the growth

Figure: Types of interventions



sectors to offer insights on where and how the GLA could improve the current landscape, and specifically tailor local interventions to enhance skills, and employment matching, services for diverse groups locally - thus better supporting more inclusive growth.

FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

The research has found that whilst there are many exciting future careers in all of the growth sectors, there are limits to the extent that these are currently available to diverse workers. In a context of constraints on resourcing, and growing labour and skills shortages, this was something industry participants urgently wanted to address.

As such, EDI was broadly acknowledged as an important priority for action within the GLA. Whilst the diversity picture varied from one sector to another, the research highlighted problems for diverse workers securing a foothold in the sectors as well as progressing.

So, in highly skilled sectors such as the digital, creative and green construction sectors, where growing jobs call for significant technical know-how and high skills, there is a general lack of

diversity in a broad range of jobs from entry to senior levels.

In contrast, in sectors such as hospitality and health, whilst the workforce may be more diverse in lower skilled roles, under-representation is still significant as individual progress into more senior and management positions, pointing to problems of retention and progression.

With the research identifying multiple barriers limiting diversity within the priority sectors and presenting obstacles to individuals across all stages of their career pathway, a core focus of the research has been to offer insights on where and how the GLA could specifically tailor local interventions to overcome barriers in future.

With that in mind, the assessment of inclusive working practices through the research, and the mapping of policy initiatives within London, especially those with a sector-focus, has provided an opportunity to understand priority areas for future policy interventions. This has pointed to actions that can add value to the current landscape of EDI support in London.

In short this has been looking to fill gaps in current provision

and customise activities in skills development, employment services and business support and networking more to the needs of particular communities (various business sectors, of different size and in varying locations) and diverse groups (that is of a certain age, gender, ethnicity and disability).

These tailored activities include: careers information and work inspiration activities; steps to enhance access into further and higher education, technical and vocational pathways (initial and continuing); training and professional development (especially for adults); networking and mentoring programmes; and short courses especially to enhance pre-employment and employability skills.

A primary focus so far has been helping to optimise the sector offer to better support diverse workers through the research insights for the Mayor’s programmes such as the Academies and for the Workforce Integration Network (WIN). Partners within these hubs are evolving a range of services over time.

In a context, where it is vital that employers are part of those communities to inspire change, and share learning about what has worked around innovations in practices, the research also draws attention to employer case studies and these are being used to shape good practice resources and guidance.

With the promise of significant growth in London over the coming years, this is showing all the signs of a growing movement for change, and the upside of a harsher economic climate is a growing interest at the same time in different partners taking part.

Whilst there will be no quick fixes securing greater engagement is an important first step.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lesley Giles is a Director at Work Advance, where she undertakes applied research and analysis, and consultancy work, around skills, labour markets and the world of work.

Lesley has worked in a variety of roles across Government for over 20 years including in employer-led, Non-Departmental Public Bodies, shaping the infrastructure for the skills and employment system to work with industry.

Lesley has held senior roles at the [UK Commission for Employment and Skills](#), at the Sector Skills Development Agency and a number of Government Departments including the former Department for Education and Employment and the Employment Service.

She's also been a researcher at the Institute for Employment studies and is a graduate of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.

ACADEMY HUBS – DIGITAL EXAMPLE

The Mayor's Academy Hub programme focuses on engaging and supporting Londoners who are underrepresented in London's priority sectors. The one for the Digital sector supports 7 hubs across different parts of London and focuses on different digital careers.

The Capital City College Group provides a network between employers, trade sector bodies, and strategic community partners supporting residents in 12 London boroughs and the City of London into a range of Digital roles including software development, programming, web development, cyber security and data analysis. Its aim is to help tackle skills shortages, whilst widening access to growing employment opportunities for diverse workers experiencing challenges getting in and on in the labour market.

College based teams such as Westminster Kingsway College, provide information and guidance to potential candidates through careers services including employability support and one-to-one advisory sessions, and seek to connect individuals to relevant training that can secure them a job within the sector. Training programmes and work placements support individuals of varying capability to progress through different stages of the career development pathway and into work, and range from short pre-employment bootcamps to longer term degree apprenticeships.

CREATIVE ENTERPRISE ZONES SKILLS & TRAINING PROGRAMME FOR THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

The Creative Enterprise Zones skills programme for creative industries has brought partners together through the GLA's network of six Creative Enterprise Zones to advance employment and skills opportunities in particular for local young people, not in education, employment and training (NEET) and those employees in the early stage of their careers.

Given the structure of the creative industries, and the high degree of self-employment and freelance work, the Enterprise Zones have been established by the GLA to strengthen employment opportunities in the creative industries supporting freelance work. As such professional networks have been nurtured locally to support artists and creative workers to learn and develop creative skills and enhance their access to employment pathways, especially business start-ups as sole traders, micro-sized and small businesses.

The programme works with local partners to give individual employability advice and connect individuals to traineeships, work placements and training to advance their skills, provide work experience and to improve their longer term career opportunities. In total, £2.15 million is being invested in skills programmes, supporting over 650 Londoners

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PLACING EMPLOYMENT WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF ADDICTION RECOVERY

In an attempt to reduce the number of economically inactive people in the UK, the Government have tried to address the issue via initiatives targeting particular groups who are perceived to have low rates of employment within this population.



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Inevitably, certain groups (often disadvantaged) are hidden and the challenges they face with regard to employment remain. One such hidden group are those in active addiction, something that is often reversed when people enter into sustained recovery, yet the stain of stigma and exclusion may act as a barrier to effective re-engagement in employment.

Research shows that employer stigma (at least perceived) is not only a barrier to employment but also negatively impacts the recovery process (UK Drug Policy Commission, 2008). Yet employment itself can facilitate meaningful change in the recovery process and can help individuals to build self-esteem and a positive social identity (Best, 2019).

For addiction recovery, there are two golden threads to sustaining meaningful change – transitioning to positive social networks and engagement in meaningful activities (Best, 2019).

In our early Glasgow Recovery Study, the two strongest predictors of better wellbeing and quality of life in recovery were spending more time in recovery and spending more of that time in meaningful activities (defined as work,

training, education, volunteering or community group participation; Best et al, 2011). We followed that up by showing, across three regions in England, that when people started employment or education their physical and psychological health and their self-reported quality of life went up; when they stopped such meaningful activities, generally those same markers went down (Best et al, 2013).

Yet, recovery support services remain a minor part of the overall network of funded addiction treatment with priority given to acute services addressing physical and psychological symptoms at the expense of (generally peer-based) services that support long-term pathways to reintegration (Dame Carol Black Review, 2021).

What this short article aims to evidence is how and why activity, and in particular employment, is associated with better recovery outcomes, based on innovative case studies that have demonstrated how recovery support can harness the desire for employment and can create sustainable recovery change in the process.

JOBS, FRIENDS AND HOUSES (JFH)

For drug users leaving prisons in the North-West of England, Lancashire Police established an innovative programme called Jobs, Friends and Houses (Best et al, 2016). The aim of the programme was literally to build recovery housing! Many people who had never worked before completed apprenticeships in building trades and in doing so contributed to a social enterprise that involved selling off half of the renovated properties and retaining the remainder as recovery housing.

For the evaluation of the first 50 people working on the project, Police National Computer data were used to demonstrate a 94% reduction in offending compared to the last year that the participants had been in the community and free to commit crime (Best et al, 2014).

What was so unique about the Jobs, Friends and Houses programme was that it created two clear aspirations for potential participants – a safe place to live and the acquisition of a trade that would allow them to develop a sense of pride and a positive identity.



It also created a bridge from prison to community reintegration by starting the apprenticeship while in prison, and continuing and completing it in the community.

However, as well as meaningful activities, the project also created positive connections (to others in recovery and to tradespeople and businesses) and a vibrant sense of collective hope and positive identity. The evaluation we conducted allowed us to test the social identity component of this change. Bliuc et al (2017) used innovative research methods involving the social network analysis of open Facebook pages linked to JFH to demonstrate that engagement and retention in the group was associated with more central positions in the social network, by having their posts endorsed more often and by using 'we' rather than 'I' language in posts.

In other words, the programme generated a sense of belonging that created a pride as well as a belonging to JFH. Participants who were more central to the social network were more likely to be retained in the JFH programme and more likely to make positive changes.

“Employment is likely to be a marker of change as much as a cause of it – but its role should not be under-estimated in providing a building block for dignity, pride and change. It is important for policy makers, employers and communities to understand that ‘employment’ for some encompasses more than being simply economically active. The benefits extend beyond the individual, to ‘co-workers, employers, families, and the communities’.”

RECOVERY CONNECTIONS AND SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

Building on this model, a community recovery organisation in the North-East of England, Recovery Connections, has developed a series of social enterprises to support and promote the recovery processes through pathways to employment for people in Middlesbrough. These include:

- Fork in the Road – a café and restaurant that provides volunteering and employment opportunities to people in recovery
- Linked to this is the Fork Academy where people early in their recovery journey can undertake a basic food hygiene and preparation course at the end of which they are guaranteed a job interview with a large fast-food chain
- There is also a food van which takes the food prepared in the restaurant out to sell as a mobile food unit
- There is also an online business selling ‘Recovery Roast’ coffee

This list is not fixed and is linked to tapping into local resources and skills, and this is a model that is commonly used by people in recovery across the UK. In the first ever national “Life In

Recovery” survey (Best et al, 2015) around three quarters of those in stable recovery (defined as five years or more of continuous sobriety) were in full-time employment.

BRINGING RECOVERY AND EMPLOYABILITY TOGETHER

It is not the case that every person starting out in recovery will need a full-time job (nor that all will be capable of holding one down), nor that work can ‘cause’ recovery without other factors or circumstances being in place. But the relationship between employment and recovery is likely to be correlational and dynamic. The recovery evidence base is predicated on the concept of CHIME (Connections, Hope, Identity, Meaning and Empowerment; Leamy et al, 2011).

Employment may help to challenge self-stigma, low self-esteem, provide a routine and an income, and provide access to new social networks and community resources and may help people to transition away from the routines and roles involved in addictive behaviours. It is likely to be a marker of change as much as a cause of it – but its role should not be under-estimated in providing a building block for dignity, pride and change.

It is important for policy makers, employers and communities to understand that ‘employment’ for some encompasses more than being simply economically active. The benefits extend beyond the individual, to “co-workers, employers, families, and the communities” (Frone, Chosewood, Osbourne & Howard, 2022, p.486).

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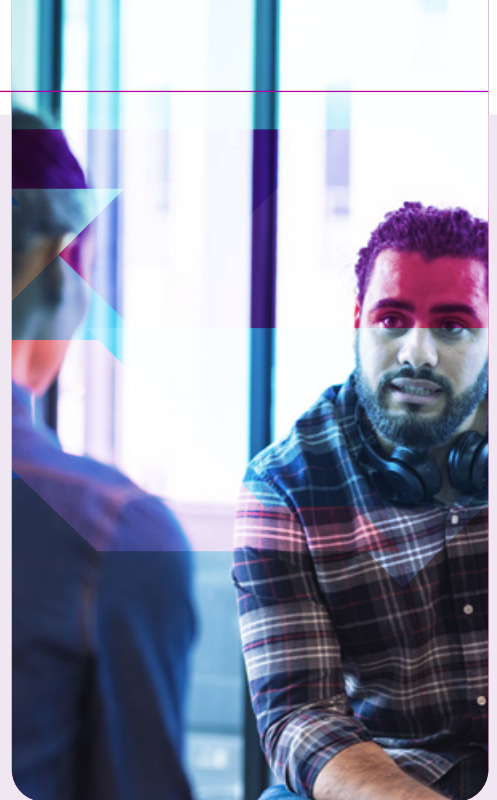
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LOCALISM, LEVELLING UP AND CHANGING OUR THINKING ABOUT OUR SKILLS BASE



The UK 'Levelling Up' agenda, being formalised through Conservative policy, has grand ambitions to tackle economic inequalities across geographical areas and related developments to devolve funding for skills.

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This is one lever which has the potential to address regional disparities. This article considers the progress made in relation to the unequal distribution of skills and education.

Whilst basic economic theory might suggest to us that overall economic growth can have positive benefits for wider society through increasing investment, jobs, pay and spending (the 'trickle down' effect), it is not necessarily the case that the more wealthy a nation is the more equal is it (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). As place-based policy has gained credence over the last decade, much policy remains committed to this as a means to address inequalities across different geographies. In England, moves to devolve greater levels of governance and funding to regions through Metropolitan Mayoral regions and Combined Authorities ought now be beginning to deliver. However, the latest UK Census reveals particular patterns in the distribution of individuals with qualifications of Level 4 and above, with concentrations in London and the South East having a majority of residents with qualifications which are Level 4 or above. This sits in contrast to high numbers of those without any formal qualification, particularly in eastern coastal areas

and a significant number of northern towns and metropolitan areas in England (ONS, 2023); there has been little significant change to these trends since 2011.

Whilst 'growth creates the resources needed for better education, health, and security, and for higher incomes' (World Economic Forum, 2017), the way in which such resources flow is not always aligned to need. In the UK, place-based economic development approaches are increasingly embedded into strategies of 'inclusive growth' or 'good growth', many of which are established in the context of disparities in equality (i.e. inequality) which are determined by the locality or region in which one lives. More place-based policy has the potential to address these disparities and 'level-up', namely through initiatives that are tailored specifically to local and regional characteristics. Local skills policies tend to fit with two aspects of economic growth which do not always align. The first is the 'traditional' viewpoint – which links economy and education using human capital-based arguments. This sees higher levels of skills and education correlating to higher levels of employment and economic productivity, where education is a means to provide a skilled workforce that contributes to

a growing economy, and job creation in key sectors and bringing together the supply of skills with perceived demand. Second, alignment to notions of 'inclusive growth' in relation to skills. This provides opportunities to access skills and jobs as a means for individuals to participate in society. Whilst these two viewpoints do not necessarily run in parallel, they are not, of course, mutually exclusive. The latter is more akin to the human development approach based upon the writings of economist Amartya Sen and his focus upon freedoms or 'capabilities' (Sen, 1980; 1999) and runs counter the ideal of economic growth for its own sake. The approach has been further developed by a number of theorists, notably human development theorists who have developed Sen's thinking further in the context of education (Boni & Walker, Walker & Unterhalter, 2007; 2016). The capabilities approach sees human development as the objective and whilst this can be supported by economic growth, it is the means rather than the objective (Alkire, 2005; Nussbaum, 2006). These views are useful in bringing together perspectives on policies related to both education and economy. Robyens (2006) in particular identifies a distinction between human capital theory, human rights and the capability



approach which can be useful when considering skills development initiatives.

Moving away from a manufacturing and production base of the industrial revolution, which created a new type of regionalism or 'sectoral spatial specialisation' (Massey, 1994), the UK now operates with a stronger 'knowledge economy'. The role of place may appear to have become less meaningful. The extent however to which knowledge-based employment opportunities exist for all has been contested (Tomlinson, 2005; Wolf, 2002).

This has implications for both skills development as well as devolved policy that enables the creation of jobs and access to these jobs.

A universal basic offer in education (e.g. access to basic literacy skills) is generally accepted within society as a good thing. The extent, however, to which a universal system delivers outcomes for the greatest number of individuals in a truly utilitarian sense can vary, as this assumes that all actors have an equal standing. National and international (such as that which is implemented across the European Union) policy assumes that there is a single set of solutions which

can support a vast range of individuals with many differing characteristics. However as identified, there are disparities in England in the distribution of both wealth and of higher level skills. Using the example of black and minority ethnic populations we can see how such a utilitarian approach may not be desirable. There are clear differences in the ways in which black, Asian and minority ethnic individuals access and succeed in both higher education and the employment market compared to those who are classified as white British (see Mirza, 1992 inter alia). English regions vary in their composition and of course include citizens of minority ethnic status, for example, in London there are higher black populations and in the West Midlands and West Yorkshire there are much higher concentrations of Asian residents (those of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi heritage). Accepting the various barriers which have been cited for black and minority ethnic students and potential students, e.g. cultural expectation (Acland & Azmi, 1998), also interlinkages with class (Ball et al. 2002), poverty (Kenway & Palmer, 2007) and status (Mirza, 1992), it should be apparent that place-based policy offers an opportunity to better reflect the needs of diverse populations; moreover, it has the potential to bring together

cultural, political and economic arenas which so often operate in isolation from one another (Apple, 1995). Research reveals that many black, Asian and minority ethnic individuals apply to local universities (Shiner & Madood, 2002; Donnelly & Gamsu, 2018) and it therefore follows that if programmes are not available within their local area, then opportunities are limiting individuals in both their education experience but also in the careers that follow. Such individual decisions are shaped by a variety of factors which include individual identities, and external factors but they also point to a gap which could be filled by providers, such as a university's role in employability outcomes for the individual (Walker & Fongwa, 2017).

A greater recognition of 'place' in the both the organisation of skills policy and micro level planning could address not only the regional disparities in education level but provide a more inclusive experience. Place-based policy in this regard could be seen to be more encompassing of individual needs, but the extent to which the economic productivity of a place is held above human wellbeing as an indicator of success will determine the extent to which an individual's participation is viewed as means to an end, or as an end in itself. Arnold et al (2019)

outline the complexities of measuring spatial differences and acknowledge the plethora of inequality indicators. A human development approach would take account of regional difference by providing a person-centred approach, avoiding measures such as gross national product (GNP) per capita which can hide truths about an uneven distribution of wealth and income (Nussbaum, 2011).

The tensions which exist for education providers are both ideological and practical. With many being seen as 'public' institutions, there is an expectation that they will deliver for their locality, however the changes to administration which are brought about by new models of governance present an increasingly complex set of institutions at both national and local level (Pike, 2015). Notwithstanding, some of the issues may lie in the uneven adoption of policy as this has developed, and as Payne (2018) notes...: "devolution in England is both limited and variegated in terms of the budgets and powers devolved to different local areas" (p. 3). Looking ahead, having policy and associated funding which supports skills development at a local level appears to have the potential to address both individual and market need, and a renewed focus on geographical disparities though the rhetoric of 'Levelling-up' may offer a solution if it is given time to embed.

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ENGAGING PARENTS ON UNIVERSAL CREDIT TO HELP RESOLVE WORKFORCE SHORTAGES



Over the past five years, I have been researching the roll-out of Universal Credit for families. One of the key findings in my research is the eagerness of parents to engage in the labour market.

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Many participants worked in part-time low-paid work around family commitments and aspired to secure higher-paid work once their children were less dependent.

However, there were barriers to achieving these aspirations which I will explore individually for parents with mental health challenges and single mothers. In the final section, I will consider how to support and utilise the skills of people on Universal Credit to fill labour shortages.

BARRIERS FOR PARENTS WITH MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

In 2014 an NHS survey found that 1 in 6 people over the age of 16 in England had experienced a mental health challenge. Further, data by the ONS (2023) found that one of the key contributing factors to economic inactivity was due to long-term sickness with many people citing anxiety, depression and mental health challenges.

My research with parents on Universal Credit found that many had experienced long-term challenges for example schizophrenia or bipolar which meant they were exempt from work commitments.

However, despite their challenges all wanted to secure meaningful employment in the future and they recognised that they needed to work in an environment which would be flexible to their diverse needs.

“To help parents on Universal Credit with mental health challenges there needs to be a cultural shift away from more traditional expectations of a workplace, to adapt to the changing needs of people.”

During the coronavirus period, many people with mental health challenges benefitted from more flexible approaches to work. The World Health Organisation (2022) found that providing people with more autonomy over their workload and break schedules positively impacted people’s mental health.

Alongside strong leadership that invests in the development of mental health for employees.

Therefore, to help parents on Universal Credit with mental health challenges there needs to be a cultural shift away from more traditional expectations of a workplace, to adapt to the changing needs of people.

BARRIERS FOR SINGLE PARENTS

In 2022 1.6 million single parents received Universal Credit and 45% experienced relative poverty, mothers account for 90% of all single parents and are over-represented amongst benefit recipients (House of Lords, 2023).

Many single parents worked part-time in low-paid positions for example cleaning, in supermarkets, the food industry or local charities. However, before and during the pandemic many left or changed roles due to challenges with (formal and informal) childcare.

The current Universal Credit system means that parents must pay childcare costs upfront, whilst there is a flexible support fund for recipients, my research found that access to this was limited and dependent upon a postcode lottery.



During the 2023 spring budget, it was announced that parents on Universal Credit returning to work after economic inactivity would have their first childcare fees covered by a grant.

Whilst this is welcome, it is not applicable for those already in work who must continue to pay childcare fees upfront. This makes it difficult to secure and sustain a job with dependents, particularly with high nursery fees. All of the participants had aspired to move away from Universal Credit but experienced barriers due to the pandemic, childcare and family commitments alongside increased living costs.

However, many single mothers invested in their futures by studying at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, around their family commitments. Single parents' aspirations were based on their prospects and the future, meaning once their children were less dependent and managing with low-incomes in the meantime.

“During the 2023 spring budget, it was announced that parents on Universal Credit returning to work after economic inactivity would have their first childcare fees covered by a grant. Whilst this is welcome, it is not applicable for those already in work who must continue to pay childcare fees upfront.”

WHAT ARE THE SOLUTIONS?

Based on my research, I offer five steps that employers and practitioners can undertake to fill labour shortages by utilising the full range of people on Universal Credit:

Investment in on-site childcare --

There were barriers to employment based on the types of work available, for example, shift work, jobs in the accommodation and food industry which had unpredictable hours, mostly advertised as evenings and weekends.

However, there is a lack of not only affordable childcare but limitations with availability for unsociable hours. One approach to fill labour shortages could be through investment in on-site/local childcare that is operational to business needs, it could be subsidised at 50% for employees and open at full price to the public.

Whilst it could be costly to develop the infrastructure the benefits are long-lasting, with greater employee retention and employee wellbeing.

Consistent practice and utilising localism --

Many participants had varying experiences with the work coaches and in the jobcentres across the UK, therefore I offer two suggestions. The first is standardised training across the UK for DWP staff to ensure certain needs are being fulfilled by the work coaches, for example, CV clinics and signposting to relevant support services.

The second approach is to embrace the differences in certain areas and offer localised support by working closely with local employers, councils, and practitioners to deliver a holistic approach to support and engage parents on low incomes into work. Alongside this, there could be more practical training opportunities to

support parents and people with mental health challenges in long-term work.

Embracing caring responsibilities through flexibility and hybrid approaches

– My research participants wanted to earn a liveable wage without a top-up from Universal Credit but there is a lack of infrastructure. Both the DWP and employers need to work more closely and be more receptive to the importance of caring responsibilities for parents on a low income. This can be achieved through the expansion of flexitime and hybrid ways of working, to provide greater levels of autonomy and inclusivity. Research by the Government Equalities Office (2019) demonstrates employers who advertise flexible working policies on job applications receive a 30% increase in applicants, and in the long-term report good employee retention and increased productivity.

Small businesses, relationship building and flexibility

– Small businesses have the ability to build close-knit professional relationships between employers and employees to establish flexible and hybrid approaches. These can be discussed and negotiated between employees and employers to tailor to diverse needs and company requirements. This can be challenging for certain sectors for example the accommodation and food service, which is less able to offer a hybrid approach. But negotiations for flexitime could be determined around core business hours and shared amongst employees.

Practical approaches to support parents with mental health challenges through transparency, training and support from the point of application

– On a societal level over the past several decades, there is a greater awareness of mental health, but we need to consider the practical solutions for parents on Universal Credit. Whilst many parents with mental health challenges were exempt from working commitments as part of their Universal Credit entitlement, they aspired to secure a greater standard of living and enter the labour market. Therefore, alongside flexible and hybrid approaches, employers could be

more transparent with their approach to mental health throughout the recruitment process, beginning with the job application, during the interview process and providing training and support throughout each step.

Beyond much broader ‘regime change’ arguments concerning Universal Credit, practical solutions such as these focus on the day-to-day concerns of those living on Universal Credit and are thus going to address those barriers described above being felt by so many today.

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Robyn's research interests are interdisciplinary and related to labour markets, inequality, social policy and lived experiences.

Robyn is keen to share insights into how Universal Credit works in practice with a focus on accessibility, for those who meet the requirements and to shape public perceptions. This commitment involves sharing research widely across local community groups, conferences and universities in the UK and South Korea.



EMPLOYMENT SERVICES 3.0: CHALLENGES NOW AND LOOKING TO THE FUTURE



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THE CHALLENGING ROLE OF EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

It is commonplace to talk of new challenges, and this article will certainly document some of these. However, before looking forward, it is probably worth noting that the delivery of 'employment services' has always been a challenge.

For example, it is always the case that the delivery of employment services must reconcile competing policy pressures, such as:

- Tax payers' demands for efficiency and fairness in welfare eligibility.
- Employer needs for labour at particular skill levels in particular places and at times that meet their demands.
- Jobseekers' demands for support at difficult times in their lives and often to overcome multiple problems.

Politicians of course often speak to all three agendas depending on ideology, audience and the particular political contingencies of the moment.

Moreover, those tasked with frontline service delivery, whether referred to as Jobseeker Advisors, Employment Counsellors, Work Coaches or other (I'll use the generic 'Employment Counsellor' here). These roles combine a variety of skills and competencies that are not easily found together in the same person:

- An Employment Counsellor is part social worker; listening to the life stories of individuals who often seek or require help at moments of crisis in

their lives when they are least able to help themselves (or to be helped).

- An Employment Counsellor is also part sales person; making the case for new work, training or other support opportunities that may not align fully with the aspirations a jobseeker walks in with.
- An Employment Counsellor is part legal and administrative expert, being able to negotiate the often labyrinthine legal obligations on jobseekers and contractors.
- An Employment Counsellor is part advocate and negotiator; helping to identify and negotiate access to support, find an appropriate journey through complex regulations, especially as welfare conditionalities and piecemeal services interact in a patchwork of support, quite often with holes in it.
- An Employment Counsellor is part labour market analyst; being responsible for spotting and understanding changing skills demand from employers in real time.

Many readers will identify a list of other skills and competencies required. The list is not intended to be exhaustive, but to recognise the complexity and

multi-faceted nature of this role.

So the delivery of Employment Services always was complex, especially for those at the frontline. Lets now turn to those new challenges.

THE CURRENT CRUNCH POINT

The twin short- to medium-term crises points of Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic have only exacerbated, sped up and diverted longer-term trends associated with technological change and what is often ambiguously termed '[the Future of Work](#)'. Brexit and Covid-19 have created a multitude of different skills shortages resulting from a lack of supply (reduced [inward migration from the EU](#), EU migrants returning home, the [great resignation](#), cost of living constraints on [childcare](#) and other services) and changing skills needs as employers have implemented new technology both in the lockdown period and the post-lockdown realignment.

These add to other trends such as increased skills needs in new sectors and occupations spurred on by the 4th industrial revolution as well as the reality of [insecure and portfolio work at the other end of the spectrum](#); something that [failure to fully effectively regulate platform work](#)



has not helped. Anxiety about how these trends will continue into the future and [whether the current education and training system are able to prepare people for these labour market realities](#) have not gone away.

Employment Services are crucial to dealing with these new and overlapping challenges. As a relatively simple illustration, the [number of vacancies reported over the last year or so roughly equals the number of people who are unemployed](#) and available for work. This hints at four issues: (1) poorly matched skills (those who are unemployed do not have the skills and experience to meet the requirements of vacancies), (2) poor levels of support for people bridging the gap between their current skills and those that employers are looking for (3) low pay and poor quality work meaning that what is on offer is not sufficient to attract jobseekers to overcome barriers (n.b. [2.3m people are working and rely on Universal Credit](#) to make ends meet, almost 40% of those on UC, including in what were thought until recently to be 'good' professional jobs), and (4) problems with workers moving to areas where there are vacancies via commuting or relocation (because of the price of housing, and now mortgage costs also).

While Employment Services could and should be part of the solution to these problems, the above suggests that they currently are not meeting these challenges.

So what might be done?

THE FUTURE OF EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

First, we've been here before. In the 1980s and 1990s it became apparent that more passive Employment Services were not sufficient to meet the challenge of structural unemployment resulting from de-industrialisation, increased insecurity in many service sectors and the new IT revolution. Internationally, the answer then was to pivot toward Activation and [Active Labour Market Policies and attendant management practices](#).

But how might Employment Services now respond? My own sense is that further tightening welfare conditionalities is not the answer. That [workers in well-respected jobs now rely on welfare](#) (and 'in-work conditionalities') alongside wages tells me that there isn't much more that can be done in that direction. A new approach is needed.

Working out the details is often where the real challenge is, but to my mind there are several guiding principles, based on existing literature, evidence and research that can help shape the types of Employment Service that might meet the challenges to come, and already manifest. Limits of space mean that I will focus on just four here:

The labour market as a complex relational ensemble:

Simplistic versions of economic theory see the labour market as the purchase of labour by individual employers from individual workers. The reality is of course much more complex. So a starting point is to see the labour market as a complex ensemble of institutions and relationships in which information flow and 'economic imaginaries' are key.

It sounds complicated but it's very simple to tease out the implications.

Individuals make decisions about what jobs they want, what working conditions they find acceptable and what wages they will work for based on a set of assumptions about employer demand. These can be accurate or inaccurate and at a time of rapid change, past observations from within families, communities or social

networks can act as poor proxies for current or future trends. On the other hand, employers make decisions on where to locate, what processes to use, what technology to invest in, based on what they think individuals will do now and in the future in terms of investing time and money in skills and what they think of the quality of the educational and training courses individuals pursue. These can be accurate or inaccurate, based on better or worse information.

Individuals live and work in households

“Once we see an individual jobseeker as part of a household in which this work must take place, it no longer makes sense to treat childcare and adult social care as separate to the performance of the labour market. It no longer makes sense to think about the opening hours of schools and educational institutions as different to the expectations of other workplaces. It no longer makes sense to persist with outdated parental leave expectations, or to treat sick leave as an annoying encumbrance on employer practice.”

The discussion above is focussed on individuals as jobseekers. But as feminist economists have been arguing for many decades, [individuals live in households which act as units of ‘social reproduction’](#).

Again, sounds academic, theoretical and technical. It doesn't have to be.

To be able to go to work tomorrow, and to raise the next generation of

workers – the labour force of the near and further future – a whole range of work has to take place; washing, cooking, cleaning, caring, educating, passing on norms and values. This forms (and reforms) the social reproduction described above, and they regularly point out that (a) this work is done disproportionately by women, (b) it is often unpaid or (c) low paid when done in the formal labour market (and still disproportionately by women), and (d) absolutely necessary.

All obvious – but also revolutionary. Once we see an individual jobseeker as part of a household in which this work must take place, it no longer makes sense to treat childcare and adult social care as separate to the performance of the labour market. It no longer makes sense to think about the opening hours of schools and educational institutions as different to the expectations of other workplaces. It no longer makes sense to persist with outdated parental leave expectations, or to treat sick leave as an annoying encumbrance on employer practice. All require the ensemble of relations between labour market institutions – including education, care, training, public transport, housing availability and inter-household politics and regulation to work together with employers.

People and employers are experts in their own worlds, but sometimes need a bit of help

The discussion above suggests that joined up thinking, partnership working, multi-agency collaboration are all important. To throw in another buzzword: so is co-creation. If we accept that people live in households with messy relationships and imperfect resources, it has to be right to work with those people and other household members to co-create the solutions to their collective problems.

Co-creation here means several things. It means working with jobseekers rather than against them, forming relations of mutual trust rather than fear and suspicion, as we know is sometimes the case. As Tristram Hooley points out (page 20) individuals need to be in a position to shape their own future prospects.

But it also means sometimes working with several members of a household simultaneously so that they can balance their mutual obligations and find solutions that work across relationships, rather than pulling separately in different directions.

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Of course there are times where there is no scope for this. Robyn Fawcett's work (on page 36) shows that domestic violence is an important barrier to employment, mainly for women. But even then, seeing that individual as part of these relationships and working with them to find a solution is the only way to generate employment outcomes for women in this position.

Its all about transitions

Gunther Schmid has been promoting the idea of [‘transitional labour markets’](#) for several decades. This is the straightforward recognition that Employment Services – and welfare transfer payments – need to recognise that people will increasingly make transitions between different forms of labour market status, as they seek to negotiate the complex ensemble of institutional relations and their messy social reproduction arrangements. They will transit from education to work, back into training,

into work once more, into caring roles and all the time may combine part time or flexible working. The key here is that services and professionals are able to facilitate these transitions in as frictionless way as possible.

There are significant and obvious prizes here. A large section of the gender pay gap (and lost productivity) in most societies is related to the ongoing impact of childcare breaks. This is senseless and damaging at the individual, household, workplace and whole economy scales. It is also true of the increasing problem of combining flexible work at older ages with caring for older relatives and grand children.

CONCLUSION

My call here is for a radical rethinking of Employment Services and the Employment Counsellor role but also the way that services relate to the regulatory environment and other services (notably care, education, training, planning, public transport etc). The contribution from the West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) to this issue shows that local institutions can facilitate coordination and joined up working. However, local solutions with national services split between different providers and with localised responses to perceived gaps in provision also raise the prospect of a fragmented system. Local autonomy does though offer the possibility of thinking radical thoughts, the four principles above offer one suggested avenue for making progress to a new type of employment service.

Lastly, Employment Service providers are employers also, of course. I started this piece recognising the complexity of the Employment Counsellor role. This means that high standards of recruitment and matching, training and support for high performance working are necessary in these organisations and roles also, as a prerequisite for making progress to the sort of bold new Employment Services envisioned here.



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