

**nesta**

**Finding Opportunities  
in Uncertainty**

The information and support  
that workers need to navigate  
a changing job market

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# Finding Opportunities in Uncertainty

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## About Open Jobs and the Centre for Collective Intelligence Design

This report was commissioned by Nesta's Centre for Collective Intelligence Design as part of the Open Jobs initiative. At the Centre for Collective Intelligence Design we explore how human and machine intelligence can be combined to develop innovative solutions to social challenges.

Open Jobs is focused on helping individuals, organisations and governments take more informed labour market decisions through carrying out data-driven research, place-based experimentation and advocating for smarter labour market policies.

To find out more visit <https://www.nesta.org.uk/project/open-jobs/>

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# Executive summary

Based on ethnographic research that followed 18 workers from Newport, south east Wales, this report describes the ways in which people look for opportunities in an uncertain world of work. In addition, it provides recommendations that service providers and policymakers can use improve the way that workers navigate the changing job market.

In a labour market where more than nine million people in the UK are currently furloughed as a result of Covid-19, and six million workers are at risk of permanent displacement from their current roles by 2030, it is vital that workers are helped to transition into viable and desirable roles. Through identifying sources of friction that people commonly face in navigating the job market throughout their careers, the aim of the report is to inform the development of more intelligent data-driven services and policies that reduce employment and skills mismatch.

The research demonstrates:

- Workers struggle to find the information they need to efficiently explore opportunities in the labour market and make decisions about their careers.
- The limited career adaptability resources of workers, particularly a lack of career confidence, often prevent them from being more strategic in their career navigation.
- Workers experience career navigation as costly, risky and demoralising.

These challenges impede the ability of workers to foresee risks to their jobs, and find viable and desirable alternative roles. In an increasingly uncertain labour market, these barriers to effective career navigation will contribute to increased skills mismatch and its resulting negative impacts on productivity and wages.

The report presents four key insights to inform the development of services and policies that can help workers more effectively adapt to a changing labour market.

- 1. Multidimensional data about jobs and occupations can help workers make career decisions more efficiently:** The research participants identified a wide range of information – from salary to sector outlook – that would help them to identify viable and desirable roles, and choose between opportunities for work. We argue that, to provide this, government, education providers, employers and job search platforms must work together to generate, open up and share relevant data about jobs and skills.
- 2. Information, advice and guidance can be targeted by identifying a worker's approach to career navigation:** We identified three approaches to career navigation – 'opportunistic', 'strategic' and 'stuck' – which each require different types of support. To help service providers and policymakers to understand these needs, the report provides personas which represent workers who adopt each approach.
- 3. Workers are more able to navigate an uncertain labour market if they are supported to develop the full range of career adaptability resources:** Alongside building their confidence, curiosity, commitment and sense of control, it is also important to prompt career navigation by raising workers' concerns about the future of their occupation.
- 4. Services for career navigation will be more successful if they simulate the support offered by family and friends:** Workers rely on members of their social circle as sources of trustworthy, tailored and discreet careers support and advice. Providers of formal tools and guidance should aim to simulate these qualities.

# 01

## Introduction

# Why the UK needs a real-time map of the changing labour market

In recent months, the fallout from the Covid-19 crisis has become the dominant driver of uncertainty in people's working lives, disrupting the employment of more than nine million people in the UK.<sup>1</sup> This unprecedented shock occurs at a time when the labour market already faces an unpredictable future.

In 2017, Nesta identified seven trends that are changing the demand for skills: technological change, globalisation, demographic change, environmental sustainability, urbanisation, increasing inequality and political uncertainty.<sup>2</sup>

By 2030, these trends will contribute to the permanent displacement of up to six million workers from roles where their capabilities will no longer be needed.<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere, they will stimulate the creation of new jobs, requiring different combinations of skills. Even before the coronavirus pandemic it was clear that there is a growing need for workers to become capable of finding pathways through a shifting labour market into jobs that make use of their skills and offer them a secure future.

We refer to this ability as 'career navigation' and, like any form of wayfinding, efficient career navigation requires a reliable map.

Such a map should enable workers to identify and choose between a range of viable career destinations. It should expand workers' aspirations by helping them to plot pathways to higher earnings through relevant, high-quality learning opportunities. It should also provide accurate, up-to-date information about the changing landscape of jobs so that workers don't find themselves stuck at a dead end.

In the UK, such a map does not currently exist. The labour market intelligence that would enable it to be created is dispersed, often incomplete and not deployed in a way that allows stakeholders to spot disparities between skill supply and demand, identify opportunities for transitions between jobs and help people prepare for growing occupations.<sup>4</sup> To address this, the labour market needs to get smarter, linking data generated by education providers, employers, job search sites and government.

The UK's inability to gather and act on this collective knowledge has already shaped a labour market in which 40% of workers are in roles that are poorly matched to their skills.<sup>5</sup> Worryingly, it threatens the country and its citizens' ability to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic. Rebuilding an efficient labour market will require the upskilling and redeployment of millions of workers who have been furloughed or made redundant. Getting this wrong has major consequences: the negative effects of job losses and worker transitions into poorly matched roles are well documented. For individual workers and their families, job displacement is associated with chronic salary reductions, poor mental health outcomes and even higher risk of mortality. For the economy, misapplication of valuable human capital and the degradation of skills leads to a reduction in productivity, high staff turnover and wage suppression.<sup>6</sup>

### Uncovering the information and support workers need to navigate a changing job market.

Through Nesta's Open Jobs programme, we have been employing collective intelligence techniques to explore the ways in which innovative data science methods, novel datasets and human judgment can be applied to anticipate job losses, identify where the demand for skills is growing and facilitate the redeployment of workers into roles that make the best use of their skills and abilities. Our prototype Skills Taxonomy (2018), for example, used 41 million UK job adverts to show how live data can be used to track changing demand for specific skill clusters.<sup>7</sup> The ongoing Mapping Career Causeways project (2019-2020) will identify viable and desirable job transition pathways for workers whose roles may be disrupted by automation, and use the knowledge of workers, careers advisors and policymakers to validate these recommendations.<sup>8</sup>

We are not alone in undertaking this type of work. A recent experiment from researchers at the University of Edinburgh demonstrated that in a lab environment, data about viable alternative occupations and jobs has a positive effect on the job search outcomes of unemployed jobseekers

when incorporated into an online tool.<sup>9</sup> Yet for all the theoretical *potential* of providing granular, timely and relevant information on jobs to support workers, there's a wide gulf between this experimentation and practical, large-scale use. We are still some way from creating a map for career navigation that is intuitive for workers to use and helps them to overcome the challenges they face when looking for work.

To understand what information such a map should convey to help people to find opportunities in an uncertain labour market, we sought to build a clear picture of the way they currently look for work. By identifying the types of information workers prefer, the resources they rely on and the challenges they face, this report presents insights to inform the development of more intelligent data-driven services and policies that reduce employment and skills mismatch.

### Aims of this research

Nesta commissioned the consultancy BritainThinks to help us understand how people whose jobs are susceptible to disruption make decisions about their careers. Between 27 January and 16 March 2020, they followed 18 research participants based in Newport, south east Wales, a city in which many jobs face an uncertain future.<sup>10</sup>

Conducted through WhatsApp messages, regular telephone interviews and a workshop, the research aimed to generate insights to inform the development of tools and services that can help workers navigate an uncertain labour market by revealing:

- The decision-making processes of workers in their search for career opportunities.
- The information workers need at each stage of their search, and how well that need is currently being met.
- The factors that influence workers' approaches to career navigation.

For a description of the methods used, see Appendix 1

02

Newport: A city with  
experience of uncertainty

In towns and cities across the UK, workers are facing increased disruption to their jobs. The *Cities Outlook 2018* report from Centre for Cities predicted that in the average UK city, 20.2 per cent of workers were currently employed in roles that were very likely to decline as a result of automation.<sup>11</sup>

To understand how workers in this position might respond to job uncertainty, and identify what information and support could help them to navigate a changing labour market, we chose to learn from people in Newport, a small city in Wales.

The prospect of a changing job market is nothing new to the residents of Newport, and the challenges faced by its residents are representative of people across the UK. As in other UK towns and cities, a thriving manufacturing sector once gave work to many in the area but has declined in recent years.

In the mid-1960s, the Llanwern steelworks on the outskirts of the city employed 6,000 people; in 2001 it ended its steel-making operations with the loss of 1,300 jobs.<sup>12</sup> Along with other manufacturing industries, steel has continued to provide employment in the local area but this has remained uncertain since the heyday of the industry. In January 2020, as this research began, Liberty Steel Group announced that it would cut around 70 jobs in Newport.

While some jobs have been lost, others have been created. After being granted city status in 2002, Newport received a wave of new investments to help regenerate the local area, bringing in hotels and shopping centres. In 2018, retail, hotels and restaurants employed 18% of the total workforce, providing 49,000 jobs,<sup>13</sup> contributing to a low unemployment rate of just 3.6% prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Nonetheless, jobs in Newport remain slightly more at risk of disruption than the UK average: according to Centre for Cities, 23.4% of workers are in roles that are very likely to decline.<sup>14</sup> Newport therefore provides a valuable case study of a small UK city that has already experienced uncertainty in the labour market and in which many workers will need to find new opportunities in the coming years.

# Residents' views of living and working in Newport

In order to contextualise this research, we wanted to understand what it is like to live and work in Newport. On 7 January 2020, we conducted a focus group with eight local residents.

## Views of Newport as a place to live

*'It's quite sad, I have grown up around here and it was absolutely vibrant. It means a lot to me, such a big city has had such a big decline.'*

The Newport residents we spoke to valued the city's community spirit, surrounding countryside and location. The proximity of cities like Cardiff, Cwmbran and Bristol contributed to the perceived importance of Newport and gave a sense that it is 'on the map'.

Yet despite newspaper reports to the contrary,<sup>15</sup> many felt that the city had 'gone downhill' in recent years. Newport was awarded city status in 2002, a move perceived by some to have had a negative impact on prosperity in the city. Residents felt that rent and business rates had increased after Newport became a city but that wages had not risen to reflect this. Additionally, the growth of out-of-town retail and hospitality centres was felt to have occurred at the expense of the flourishing of the city centre.

*'There are jobs available, but they're not good jobs. You really have to have something special up here [participant motions to their head] to have the strength to stick with the kind of work that's available. It's so boring and some of it is awful, really horrible.'*

### Views of Newport as a place to work

The Newport residents we spoke to identified manufacturing, retail and hospitality as the most important sectors in the local area.

While people thought the **manufacturing** sector characterised Newport's identity they also felt it had declined significantly over the past 50 years. They considered jobs in this sector to be particularly unstable due to factory closures, zero-hour contracts and short-term contracts during construction and busy periods.

The focus group participants considered work in **retail** to be at risk due to increasing automation and the growing popularity of online shopping. They believed that Newport's retail sector was outperformed by the greater range of shops offered in the nearby cities of Cardiff and Bristol. People felt Newport was now dominated by branches of national chain stores, meaning that available retail work was particularly badly paid and low-skilled.

The **hospitality** sector in Newport was felt to be thriving due to the recent construction of multiple large new hotels. However, as with retail, this sector primarily offered low paid work with little stability, and zero-hour contracts were felt to be particularly common. The view among residents was that large hotel chains tended to recruit senior positions from outside the local area, thereby reducing the number of well-paid employment opportunities for people living and working locally.

Some residents perceived that a lack of job opportunities in the area had led to unemployment being a particular problem. Others believed that opportunities were available but that these jobs were unattractive. In particular they noted that the work available was low-skilled, low-paid and temporary – offering limited job security and satisfaction

# 03

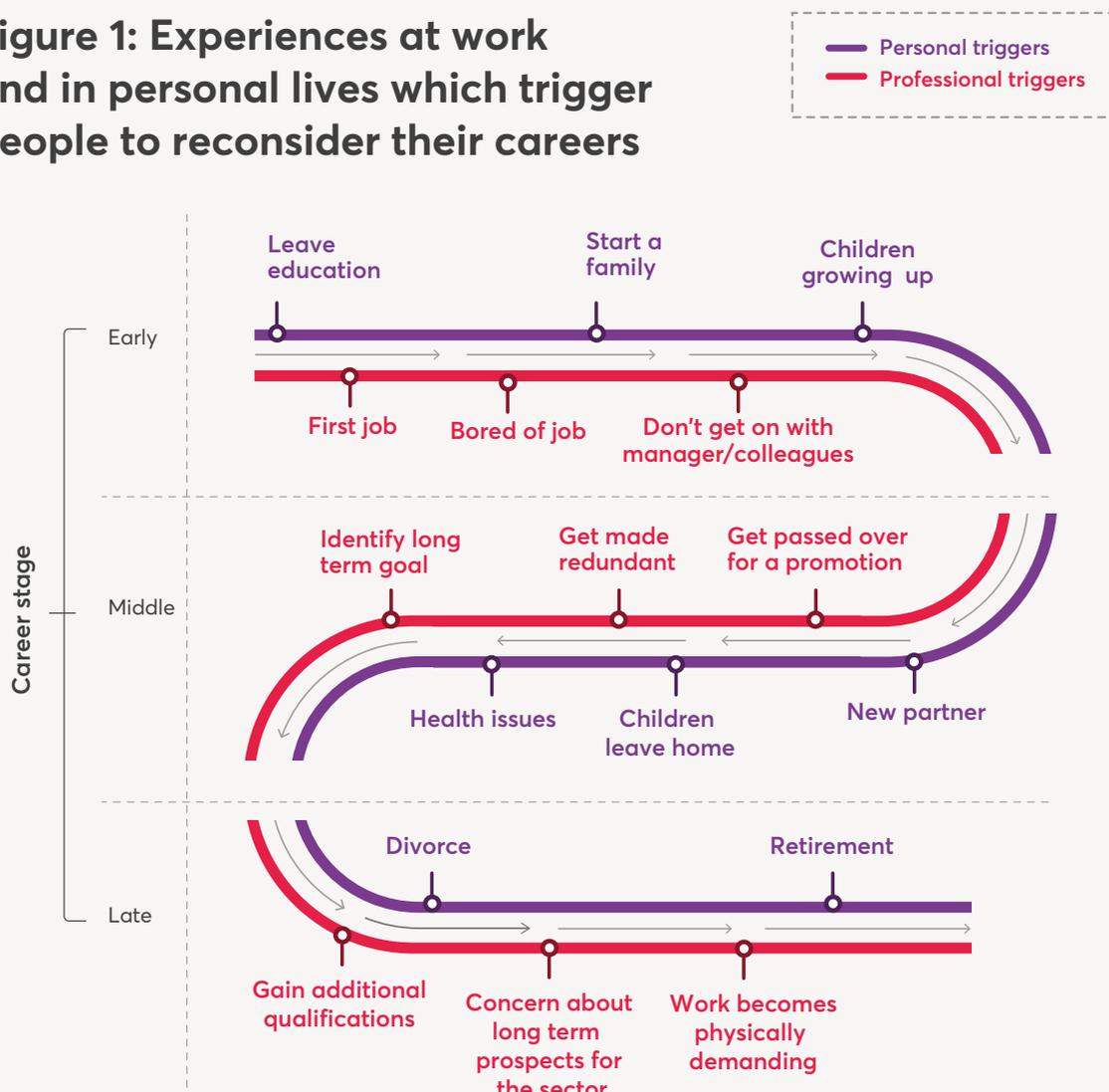
Three approaches  
to career navigation

*'At no point have I had a plan. I've... done whatever I can to pay the bills.'*

Through this research we sought to understand how workers navigate uncertainty throughout their careers and identify the factors that shape their approaches to career navigation.

We identified a number of experiences in people's professional and personal lives that triggered them to think differently about their current work and future careers.

**Figure 1: Experiences at work and in personal lives which trigger people to reconsider their careers**

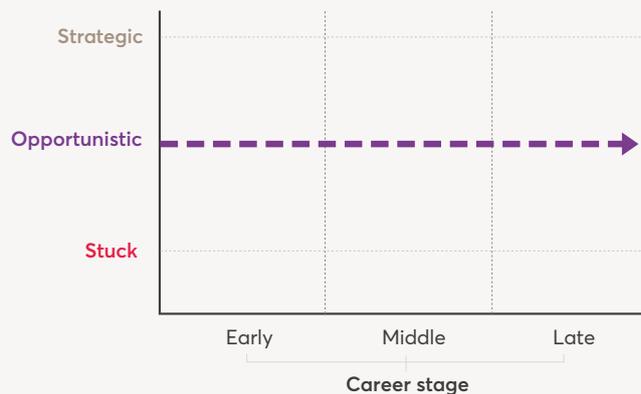


We found three broad types of approach to career navigation: 'opportunistic', 'strategic' and 'stuck'.<sup>16</sup>  
 In general, the approach each worker used to explore new career paths was related to the stage they were at in their working lives.

The career navigation approaches are illustrated with personas throughout this report in order to help readers understand their implications for policy and service design.<sup>17</sup>

**Figure 2: Approaches to career navigation are associated with career stage**

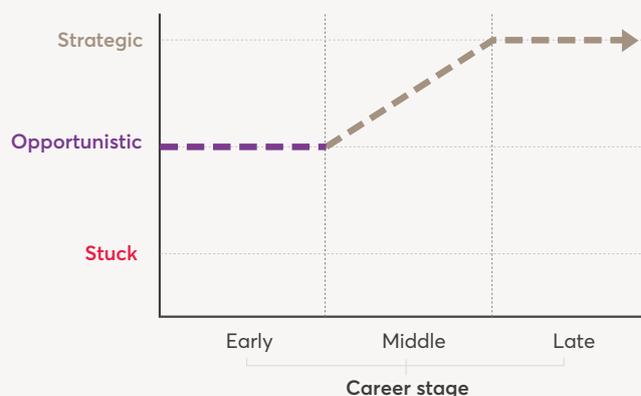
 **Opportunistic career navigation**



Many people prioritise gaining an income as quickly as possible upon leaving school. Some remain with this opportunistic approach throughout their careers, rarely considering long term career options.

*'At no point has there been a plan. I've had bills to pay and have done whatever I need to pay the bills'*

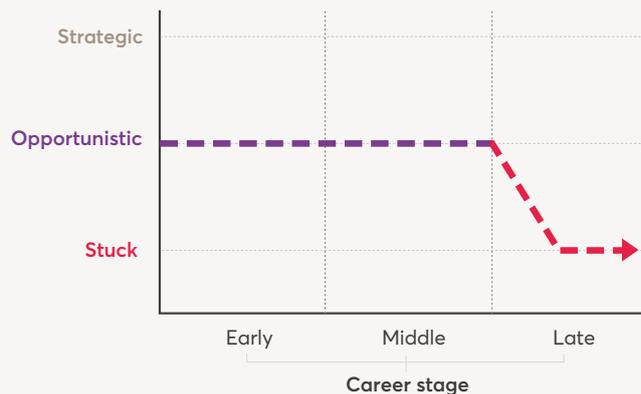
 **Strategic career navigation**



Changes to lifestyle and growing work experience are associated with a shift to a more strategic approach to career navigation.

*'Having tried to take a step back and decide what I'm good and what I enjoy, the plan is to go into project management. I'm studying for a degree.'*

 **Getting stuck in career navigation**



People in the later stages of their working lives position can feel stuck – needing to find a new occupation, but feeling unable to do so.

*'If I don't change I'll get tired. You have to have a life at the end of the day.'*



# Opportunistic career navigation

**Most research participants told us that their priority on leaving school was to earn an income as quickly as possible. The majority said they did not have any useful careers advice at this point, and that they relied heavily on parental guidance.**

At this early stage of their working lives, most were thinking short term. The interviews highlighted a number of possible trigger points that can move workers into a more long-term mindset:

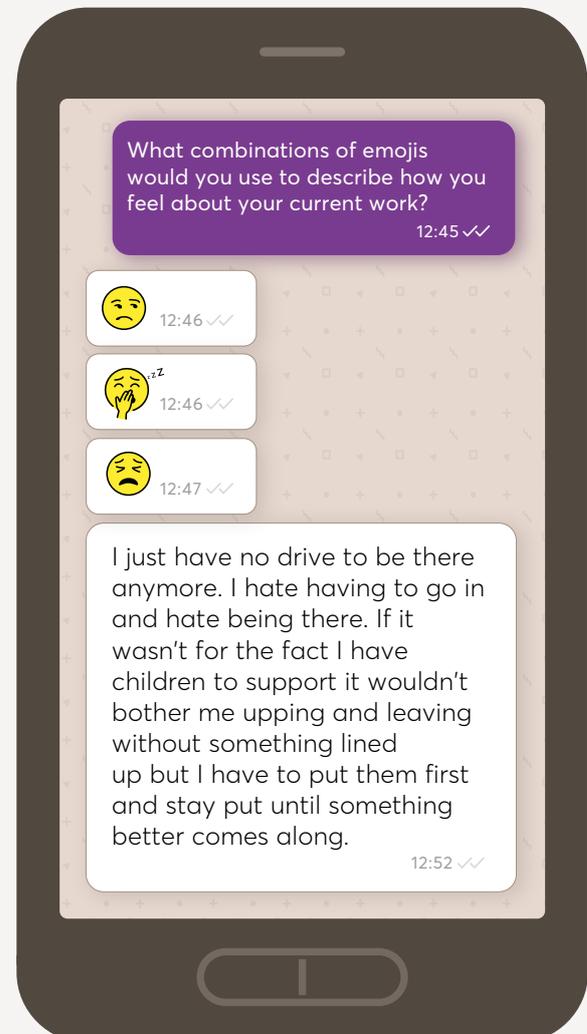
- Becoming increasingly bored or frustrated with their work.
- Having a negative experience at work, such as a bad relationship with their manager.
- Reaching a limit to progression in their job.

For many, however, starting a family has presented a barrier to acting on any impulses they had to change jobs. On having children, workers explained that their priorities shifted to increasing earnings or finding work that could fit around childcare. Often this meant they were locked into the same career path, passively waiting for opportunities to arise.

## CASE STUDY

### Jenny: Opportunistic career navigation

Jenny is 23. She left school at 16 and went to college to do an apprenticeship as a beautician. However, she didn't enjoy it and left after a year, at which point she started a job in a supermarket in Newport. Both her boyfriend and dad work for the same supermarket. It was her dad who initially told her about the job vacancy and got her the job. After a few years in the job, Jenny is starting to find it boring. She would like to move out of retail but doesn't know what else she could do.





# Strategic career navigation

**We found that people often began to consider alternative options more actively when they had gained more experience in the world of work. For parents, change can occur when children have grown up. Childcare no longer places restrictions on working hours, and pressure on income reduces. For some, priorities shifted at this stage to finding the right job for the long term.**

However, by the time they reached this point, many felt they had left it too late to make any significant change in their careers. Those in their early thirties were already worried that the window for a career change had closed.

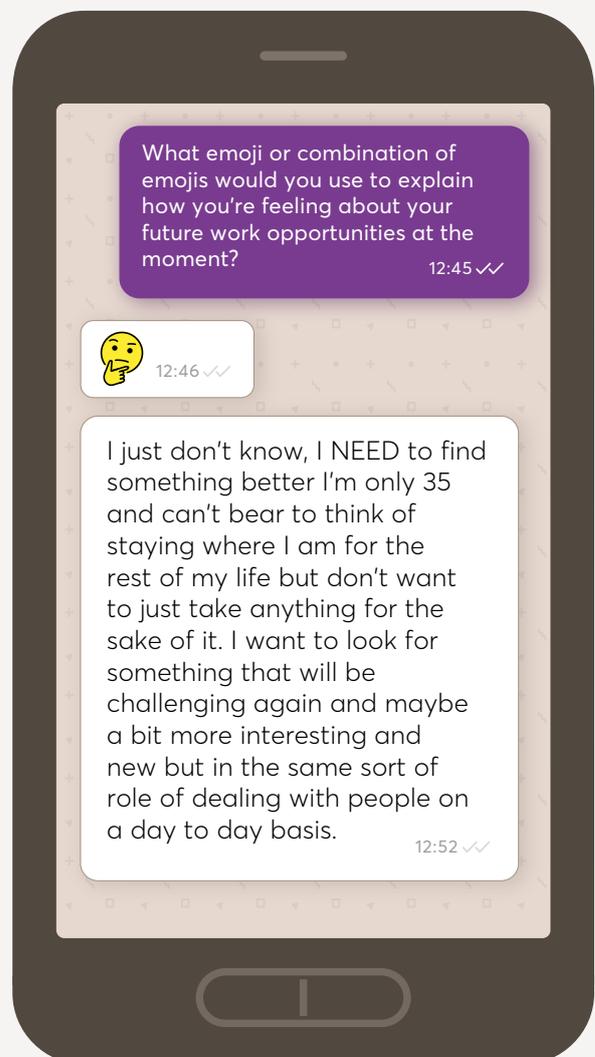
Workers who do think strategically about their careers may not always feel able to put those thoughts into action. Even if they are in a job that they feel is unsuitable for the long term, workers who are comfortable in their current position can find it difficult to explore alternative options. Events in workers' personal lives can also act as a barrier to making change. For example, one participant who was planning on getting married in the coming year had considered delaying her job search until after the wedding.

Those who have taken action were often pushed by a negative work-related trigger, such as getting passed over for an expected promotion or being made redundant. Events in personal lives can also act as positive triggers for change. A new partner might give a worker renewed confidence in their own abilities and inspire them to consider fresh options. Similarly, helping their children embark on their own careers can encourage workers to reflect on their own life path.

## CASE STUDY

### Sue: Strategic career navigation

Sue is 35 and has worked in hospitality all her life. She's had many different jobs within this sector and has progressed to managerial level, but has been considering making a change for a long time. Starting a new relationship with someone who gives her confidence has jolted Sue into action. She's confident that her hospitality and management experience has given her a lot of transferable skills, especially in customer service and management. Sue feels that she has time to be selective and wants to choose well to improve her career prospects, as opposed to just 'jumping into another job'.





## Getting stuck in career navigation

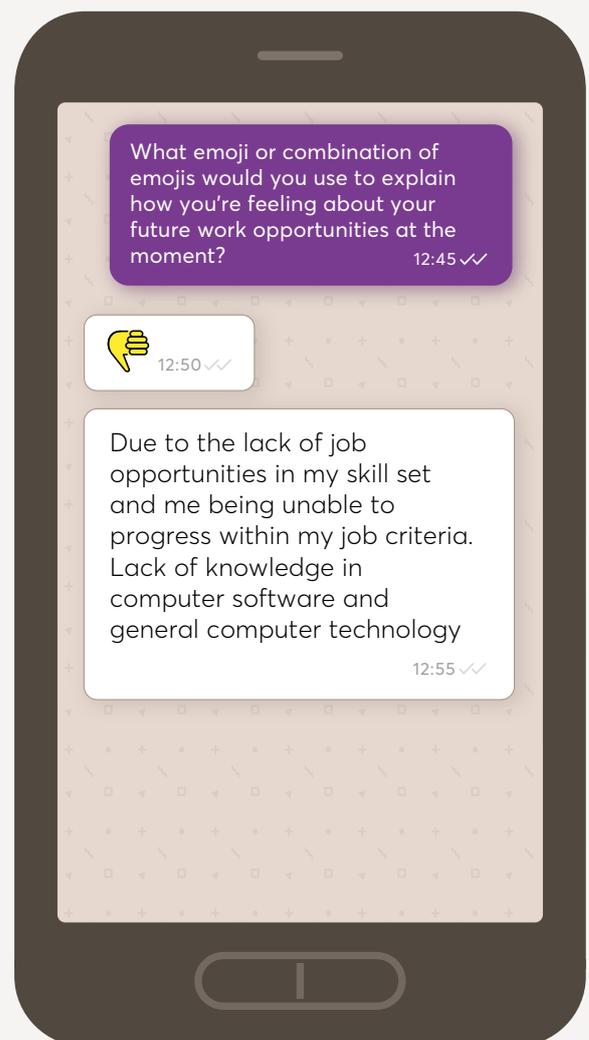
**Change is sometimes forced on workers later in their working lives. Health problems can begin to limit the type of job that workers are able to do, compelling them to look for alternatives. Similarly, the economic health of their employer or wider sector may give them cause for concern over the long-term outlook for their job.**

The priority for workers we spoke to in this position was to find a job that would enable them to adapt to new circumstances and allow them to continue working until retirement. However, making a change later in life felt daunting for them. As a result, many suffered from inertia, taking little action despite recognising the problem as pressing. For this group there are few external triggers to start exploring new roles, apart from being made redundant.

### CASE STUDY

#### Dave: Stuck in career navigation

Dave is 50. He left school at 16 and went to college where he got apprentice level qualifications in roll grinding and paint spraying. His first job was in a steel factory but for the last 15 years he's worked on the shop floor of a door-making factory. As Dave gets older, he's starting to find the long manual work more and more challenging. He's had issues with his health and, since his divorce, he's found the money isn't enough anymore. In considering his options, he's decided a desk-based job would be most appropriate for his age and offer him the best chances of maintaining his current salary level. Dave has been having the same thoughts for over a year now but has made little progress in reaching his goal.



# 04

Factors that affect  
workers' career  
adaptability

# The value of career adaptability resources

Researchers Mark Savickas and Jenny Bimrose propose that 'career adaptability' resources are central to a person's ability to respond to uncertainty throughout their working lives. This conceptual framework consists of five complementary dimensions, each of which articulates a type of resource that enables an individual to react positively when faced with the prospect of a change in work.<sup>18</sup>

The dimensions of career adaptability for an individual are:

**Career concern:** Thinking critically about what their future will be like and preparing for change.

**Career control:** Feeling a sense of agency and responsibility to make decisions that impact on their career.

**Career curiosity:** Exploring a variety of options for future roles and skills development before making a choice that is appropriate to their skills and aspirations.

**Career confidence:** Perceiving that they have the ability to solve problems and overcome obstacles in order to pursue their career aspirations.

**Career commitment:** Displaying resilience and overcoming challenges to achieve their goals.

# Low confidence often inhibits effective career navigation

Across the sample, we found confidence was a barrier for nearly all workers, even those who were the most proactive in their approach to career navigation.

## Workers lacked confidence in their own skills

Many of the research participants said they worried about whether they would be capable of doing another job well. They believed that even if they were successful in getting the job they wanted, they would not have the skills needed to succeed in that role. As a result, they said that one of the key things they looked for in a job application was the line 'no experience required' as this indicated to them that expectations would be low.

*'Identifying your own skills can be difficult. It's good when someone else says you done this and you done that. And to say you're good at it.'*

## Workers were demoralised by rejection

Many described the process of job seeking as damaging to their confidence. Sending out dozens of applications and not receiving any response or feedback drove a sense of 'I'm doing it wrong', which some described as paranoia. Over time this sapped their motivation to look for opportunities.

*'I've been ghosted so many times. Agencies are the worst. They get you all fired up and then they ghost you.'*

# Six factors which affect career adaptability resources

## Factor 1: Past experiences of searching for jobs

Past experiences formed a template for workers' approaches to career navigation. While some were creative and ambitious in their job search methods, in general there was a tendency throughout the sample to re-use methods they had used in the past. Those who had only ever found work through informal methods could find adapting to formal job application processes very challenging.

Those with experience of multiple types of work, and of formal job application processes, were more likely to display **career curiosity**, as they felt more able to broaden their horizons and look beyond what they had done in the past.

*'I've always just looked for jobs in the local Argus (newspaper). They used to have two to three pages in there... or I ask friends...if I need to get a job again it would probably be doing delivering because I've got lots of friends I could ask about vacancies.'*

## Factor 2: Influence of friends and family

The support and guidance of key mentor figures (often parents or partners) was a powerful driver of **career commitment**. Those who felt well supported were much more likely to overcome the barriers they faced to taking action. Where that support wasn't there or guidance was limited, workers found it difficult to advance their career plans.

*'I had a chat with my partner and he asked me why I was holding myself back from making a change that I've been wanting to do for so long, and it's not the job holding me back, it's more me pushing myself.'*

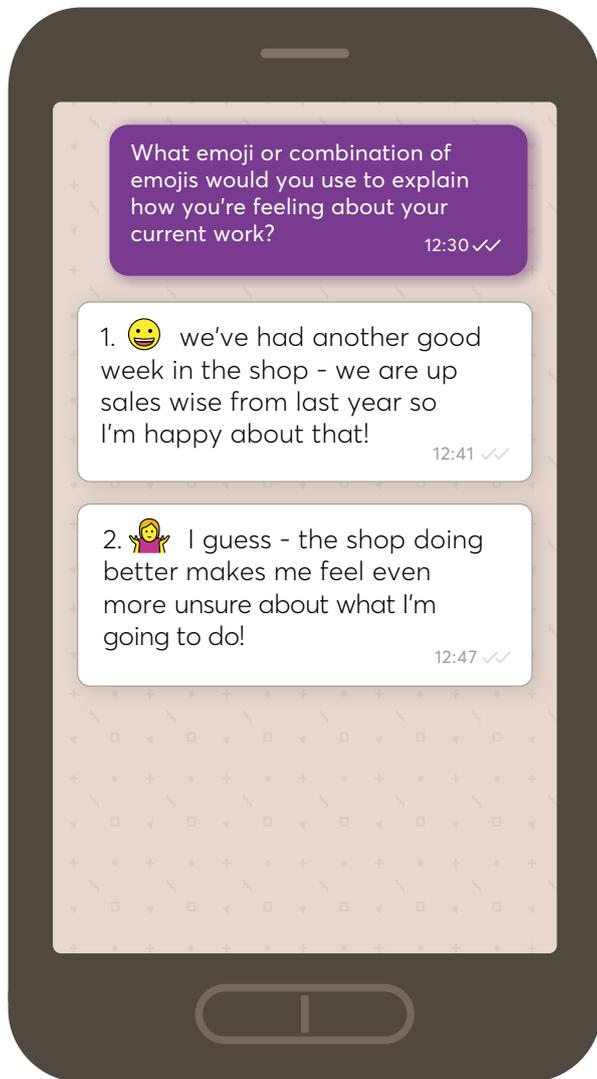
## Factor 3: Digital skills

All workers emphasised the importance of digital skills in securing success in the modern labour market, both for online job searching, and for completing applications. Workers who lacked confidence in their digital skills often felt at a double disadvantage. This primarily impacted their sense of **career control**, as it limited the options workers felt were available to them.

*'The other thing is that I'm lacking computer skills. I'm shot to bits on that. We were talking about it at work the other day, I can't send an email.'*

## Factor 4: Current experiences at work

Feeling undervalued or disempowered at work had a significant impact on **career confidence**. Workers in this position often found it difficult to identify what skills they had and how those skills might be relevant to other jobs.



Those who had positive experiences at work had much higher levels of confidence, but could experience lower levels of **career concern**. The more positive their day-to-day work experiences were, the less concerned they became about their long-term prospects, and the more likely they were to feel indecisive around whether they should move jobs.

## Factor 5: Time

Time was a key concern for all workers, and was a particular challenge for those with childcare or other caring responsibilities. Job searching can be a highly time intensive process, with time needed both for searching for different opportunities and for completing applications. Participants flagged that there is high variation in job application processes, making it difficult to apply for multiple jobs with the same information. Equally, working hours meant they were constrained in what action they could take during the working week, such as following up applications via telephone.

Time was the biggest challenge workers faced to their **career commitment**, with research participants reporting little or no action over the course of weeks as a result of lack of time.

*'I've been working every day this week, starting around 1pm and finishing at 10pm, which doesn't leave a lot of time to do anything... it's difficult to fit time in, especially with a 2 year old balancing childcare.'*

## Factor 6: Age

There was a strong perception that employers discriminate based on age, preferring to hire younger, cheaper workers. This had an impact on workers' sense of **career control** and **career confidence**. This sense of having 'missed the boat' applied to workers in their 30s as well as to those who were older. For those aged 50 and above age was seen as one of the biggest barriers they faced to achieving their goals.

*'When I was younger it was a lot easier... I don't know if it's more competitive, there are 18 year olds in the market. I have found it a lot harder. I don't have the confidence to change career.'*

## The personas show how these factors affect individuals' experiences of career navigation



### Jenny: Opportunistic career navigation

*'I don't feel confident to be honest, I'm scared to do it and scared of change. Taking that step is scary – I'm trying to boost myself to do the actual searching, but it's petrifying.'*

Most of the people Jenny knows work in retail. Her brother and her dad, who both work at the same supermarket as her, don't understand why she would want to move jobs. Jenny has only ever worked in one place and has never been through a formal application process, as her dad helped her get the job first time round. She doesn't have any formal qualifications and she's not sure what skills she has to offer an employer. Her confidence is very low and she's worried that new employers won't take her seriously.



### Sue: Strategic career navigation

*'I want to really get my teeth into it, but I haven't had as much time off this week as I'd have liked – fingers crossed I'll have opportunities next week.'*

Sue has an extensive network of friends and past colleagues, many of whom have successfully started new careers, whom she can draw on for advice and guidance. Sue also has an advantage in that she has changed jobs many times and so has experience of many different types of recruitment processes. But Sue feels daunted by the idea of making a change at this stage in her life. This isn't helped by the fact that her current manager puts her down and undermines her confidence. Sue is also working extra shifts to try to save money in anticipation that changing job might mean taking a pay cut. She's currently working a 60-hour week and feels exhausted on her days off.



### Dave: Getting Stuck career navigation

*'I need to learn about copying, pasting and forwarding. I'm CV-less. There's not a lot of jobs I can do looking at the ones that fit my skills.'*

In his 30-year career, Dave has only ever found work through word of mouth and informal processes. Sometimes he's just shown up at a business in response to an advert and sometimes it's been a friend putting in a good word for him. He's never had to write a CV and he's unsure how to do this. On top of this, Dave is nervous about how to go about looking for jobs online. He's never had to use a computer for work and he's not confident when it comes to using email or Microsoft Word. Through his many years of working, Dave has accumulated a wide circle of friends and colleagues who he can draw on for help and advice. But he's never been through a formal appraisal process at work meaning he's unsure what his skills are beyond his technical qualifications.

# 05

Information and support  
needs for career navigation

**To find an appropriate job, workers need to be able to identify roles which are both viable and desirable. This process of career navigation requires that introspection is combined with information about the local labour market over a number of steps.**

**In this section of the report, we map out these steps and identify the sources of information and support that the Newport workers turned to for help in their career navigation journeys.**

# Four steps for effective career navigation

We identified four steps that are commonly undertaken on an effective career navigation journey. The research revealed challenges that workers regularly experience around each step, along with tactics and support that they believed would help them become more successful in their career navigation.

## Step 1: Identifying career options

Despite an abundance of information about roles in their area on online job boards, workers in the sample found it difficult to know what job they should be aiming for. They felt that they needed help identifying which jobs would offer them good long-term prospects and be best suited to their skill set and wider criteria.

- **Understanding their own skill set:** Many said they found it very difficult to identify their own skills. This seemed to be more an issue of confidence than knowledge. An exercise conducted during the workshop phase of the research showed that most were able to pick out the relevant skills in others. However, when it came to themselves, they found this much more difficult to do, suggesting that skill identification is likely to be a problem related to low confidence.
- **Identifying options available for someone with their skill set:** The research participants felt that careers advice services are only useful for those who already know where they want to get to, and are not able to suggest a broader range of viable career options.

- **Finding jobs that will fit with their wider criteria:** Many workers were not simply looking to maximise their salary. While wages were important, other factors such as location or hours often presented a deal breaker. Workers said it was currently difficult to know which jobs would fit best with their wider lifestyle needs.

## Step 2: Finding opportunities

The research participants explained that job search sites make it relatively easy to search and apply for jobs. However, many in our sample expressed frustration at the inconsistency of job adverts. Several had spent time applying for jobs only to find out later that the role was unsuitable for them. They also found that job search sites do not allow them to filter effectively by location or other key criteria, making the process more time intensive.

*'If you are looking to buy or rent a house you can draw a search grid...if you could do that on a job site that would be really useful. Blackwood is 15 miles away but it would take an enormous amount of time to get there because of the roads between here and there.'*

Workers thought that job adverts should include better information on:

- **Salary:** Workers reported that salary detail can be missing altogether or be incomplete. This is hugely frustrating for those whose primary motivation in their job search is to increase their salary.
- **Hours:** Lack of detail on shift work requirements meant workers, particularly those with children, found themselves applying for jobs that they wouldn't actually be able to do because of childcare or other responsibilities.
- **Contract type:** Type of contract is incredibly important to job seekers when deciding what job to apply for. Whether it is permanent, temporary or a zero-hours contract will often be a make or break criteria. Workers found it incredibly frustrating when this information was not clearly displayed.
- **Tasks:** The same job might have several different job titles, making it difficult for workers to know what exactly a particular job entailed.

In addition, many were intimidated by the jargon used in job adverts, particularly related to qualification level or 'bands' in the public sector.

### Step 3: Developing skills

*'I went to Careers Wales, followed their advice and got all the way to applying for a job, and the first thing I was asked is do I have five GCSEs including English and Maths, which I don't have. It was disappointing, because it's like just as you think you've got somewhere...it's just disheartening and has put me off the job search a bit.'*

Workers believed that where employers were previously more willing to hire people with relevant experience, they now stipulate formal qualifications. As a result, qualifications were seen as a key challenge for career progression. We heard many people in our sample become discouraged from pursuing a certain path when they found out about qualification requirements.

Very few felt that training or upskilling would be a viable solution for them to overcome this

challenge. For most, the cost and time involved were perceived as insurmountable barriers. Many had concerns around how learning would be structured and how it would fit around work commitments. The few workers who had looked into qualifications further found that it is often unclear which courses or qualifications are valued by employers.

University websites, particularly the Open University's, were seen as a useful resource in answering these questions by the participants who had accessed them, but most were not aware that this information is available.

### Step 4: Demonstrating the right skills

*'I hate talking about myself. Hate CVs. Can't do it, can't write it, can't say it. I'm always jumbled all over the place, and I find it really difficult and tedious.'*

The research participants reported that it was difficult to demonstrate their skills when applying for jobs through formal recruitment processes. A number of participants had never created a CV and had found that there was very little support they could draw on to make one. Participants with more experience of formal recruitment reported that they found it a challenge to make their applications stand out.

The specific information that participants said would benefit them includes:

- **Guidance on what to include in a CV and cover letter:** Participants were confused about the type of information to include (particularly personal detail) and how to demonstrate and describe their skills and experience.
- **Guidance on how to use 'buzz words':** Participants felt that employers are often looking for specific words in applications but were unsure what these are or how to use them effectively.
- **Sector-specific guidance:** Participants believed that a lot of the information currently available is generic. They felt there is little guidance available on how to tailor CVs to suit different employers and different sectors, and how to appeal to employers in specific sectors.

# Workers believe it is difficult to change sector

The steps for effective career navigation were believed to be more challenging for workers who wish to change sector. The perception was that it would involve multiple stages, take a long time and result in a significant pay cut.

In practical terms, workers identified three major barriers to changing sector:

- **Job descriptions do not reflect employees' full range of responsibilities:** Many thought they were given responsibilities above their pay grade but felt unable to get recognition for these because their job title had not changed to reflect the reality of their job.

*'Technically I'm just an estimator but that's not what I'm really doing.'*

- **Employers do not recognise transferable skills:** Workers were frustrated at a perceived 'tick-box' approach to hiring, that emphasised specific experience in a specific sector rather than taking a skills-based approach.

*'It's so hard to find an employer who will even see you if you don't have the specific experience listed in the job descriptions.'*

- **Qualification requirements:** Workers felt the demand for qualifications had become greater over the years. They questioned the logic in some jobs having onerous qualification requirements when the value-add of what would be gained from that qualification in relation to that job was negligible.

*'I worked in a temporary job for maternity cover as a venues manager at Cardiff University. At the end of the year the person who was meant to come back decided not to so I applied for it, but Cardiff Uni decided they would only accept someone with a degree to do that job.'*

Even the most strategically-minded workers found it daunting to change sector. Tactics we heard over the course of the research include:

- **Using temporary work as a stepping stone:** Temp work was seen to offer a route into a new sector, but was associated with lower pay.
- **Taking a course:** Gaining a qualification that employers frequently list on job adverts, such as PRINCE2, was seen as a way to overcome the challenge of not having previous experience in that sector.
- **Connecting with people working in the target industry:** Getting first-hand information about how to navigate application processes or even asking a current employee for a recommendation was still seen as a viable way into a company, although many felt this was getting harder to do.

# Career navigation touchpoints

As workers looked for information and support to help them make decisions about their careers, they engaged with a variety of services and resources. We call these 'career navigation touchpoints'.

## Workers relied heavily on personal networks for guidance and support

*'My mum just knows me. They do, don't they? And she knows what I'm like. She would just ask me questions really about what I want to do and remind me what I used to enjoy when I did volunteering.'*

All the workers in our sample believed that drawing on their personal network offered them the best chance of success in their job search. Through their social connections, they were able to get advice from people who understood their personal needs, find support to build their confidence and aspirations, and gather

information from contacts with relevant sector or organisation experience.

Workers acknowledged the drawbacks of this approach:

- The advice they received from friends, family and colleagues was not impartial and might not be well informed.
- Some worried about exhausting their personal contacts without actually getting anywhere.
- They were concerned that their employer might find out about their job search if they were not careful who they spoke to, and that this could have a negative impact on their current work situation.

*'I would never have thought of YouTube for CV writing or a cover letter, it's the last place I would think, so YouTube really stood out to me, it could be really useful and interesting to help guide me.'*

## Digital tools were central to workers' career navigation approaches

Most workers used a combination of Google and job sites, such as Indeed.com, to get the information they needed. A few were much more sophisticated in their approach, particularly in their use of social media:

- **LinkedIn:** Some workers in our sample reported using LinkedIn for a wide variety of purposes, including extending their personal network to connect with people in target sectors, reading blog posts and advice on job seeking and asking friends to endorse their skills to boost their profile.

- **YouTube:** Younger workers said they had used 'how to' videos on YouTube to inform their CV and cover letter writing.
- **Reddit:** One worker said she posted a question on Reddit to get advice about what it was like to work in a different sector, and found this a really useful way to broaden her horizons in her job search, although she did acknowledge that it is difficult to verify the quality of the advice.

These methods would never have occurred to many participants. On learning about them, most others reacted positively and felt this was useful information to know. However, for some, particularly older workers, these methods contributed to their feeling that they do not have the digital skills required to succeed in the modern labour market.

## Very few used formal careers advice

*'It would help to know what I want to do. It would be useful to have something to help match skills to what's out there. But careers advisors are for children, not for adults.'*

Over the course of the research, it was striking how little formal careers advice featured in the journeys of our participants. Despite finding it useful to talk to people about their search rather than find information online, the participants still did not consider formal advice to be an attractive option. The reasons for this vary depending on the touchpoint (see table 1).

A key barrier to engagement was that these services were perceived to be aimed at younger people or those currently unemployed. Participants reported feeling embarrassed to be using services not meant for them.

However, those who did engage reported positive experiences:

- **Careers Wales:** The two participants in our sample who had used Careers Wales found it incredibly helpful. They reported that Careers Wales helped them make an action plan to break the search strategy down into small tasks and provided support with writing CVs and cover letters.
- **Local FE colleges:** The few participants who had accessed FE colleges found them to be informative and useful for identifying courses that might be suitable and appropriate for their job aspirations. They felt that colleges are able to provide detailed advice about course structure, content and costs, as well as where certain courses and qualifications might be most useful.

**Table 1: Barriers to uptake of formal careers advice**

Jobcentre Plus	Careers Wales	FE colleges	Job fairs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceived as not relevant for skilled workers</li> <li>• Social stigma</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceived as not relevant for adults</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of awareness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of awareness</li> <li>• Negative perceptions</li> </ul>
<i>'There is a stigma, you just think of people going in to sign on and not going back to work.'</i>	<i>'I looked on Careers Wales years ago, and I am sure I saw something about it being for 25-year olds or something.'</i>	<i>'Do they have colleges like that in Newport? I'm pretty sure there isn't anything that I could do there.'</i>	<i>'I would never go to one, I don't know what they would be like, I'm kind of blind to them.'</i>

# Desired information and support

## Reliable, consistent and tailored information

Workers commented on the abundance of materials available for activities such as writing CVs and cover letters, and searching for jobs. However, they identified three major challenges in navigating this information:

- **Information is often overly generic rather than specific to a sector:** This is particularly true when it comes to information about recruitment processes. Workers found that the expectations and requirements of employers varied hugely, and they would like to know more about the norms in the sectors they are interested in.
- **Information can be conflicting:** It can be hard to know which CV template is the 'best' one to use or which 'top tips' are the most likely to get you success.
- **It is difficult to know how to apply information to their personal circumstances:** Information available online has only very limited utility when it comes to figuring out the more personal questions of 'what skills do I have' and what 'job is right for me'.

This implies that workers would benefit from a wide range of reliable information that is targeted to their personal needs.

*'It would be great if there were a system where you could enter the skills you have and it could pop out the kind of jobs that you'd be good at – not necessarily what jobs are available, but things you might suit.'*

## A careers service designed for adults

In the final workshop, participants suggested that they would benefit from work experience to gain insight into a new sector, on-the-job training to enable transfer over to a new sector, and face-to-face advice from a careers advisor.

Participants felt that this type of support was currently only offered to school leavers, despite the fact that it had clear benefits for those who were looking to make a career change. They wanted to see a careers service that is specifically aimed at them and branded accordingly.

*'Most apprenticeships are only for school leavers. But that's exactly what I want. To get paid to train on the job. And my daughter did work experience recently. Well again, that's exactly what I need.'*

## Three career navigation journeys

The following career navigation journeys are intended to bring to life the experiences of workers when looking for opportunities in an uncertain labour market. By contextualising the highs and lows of career navigation, they can inform the development of better-targeted information and support.

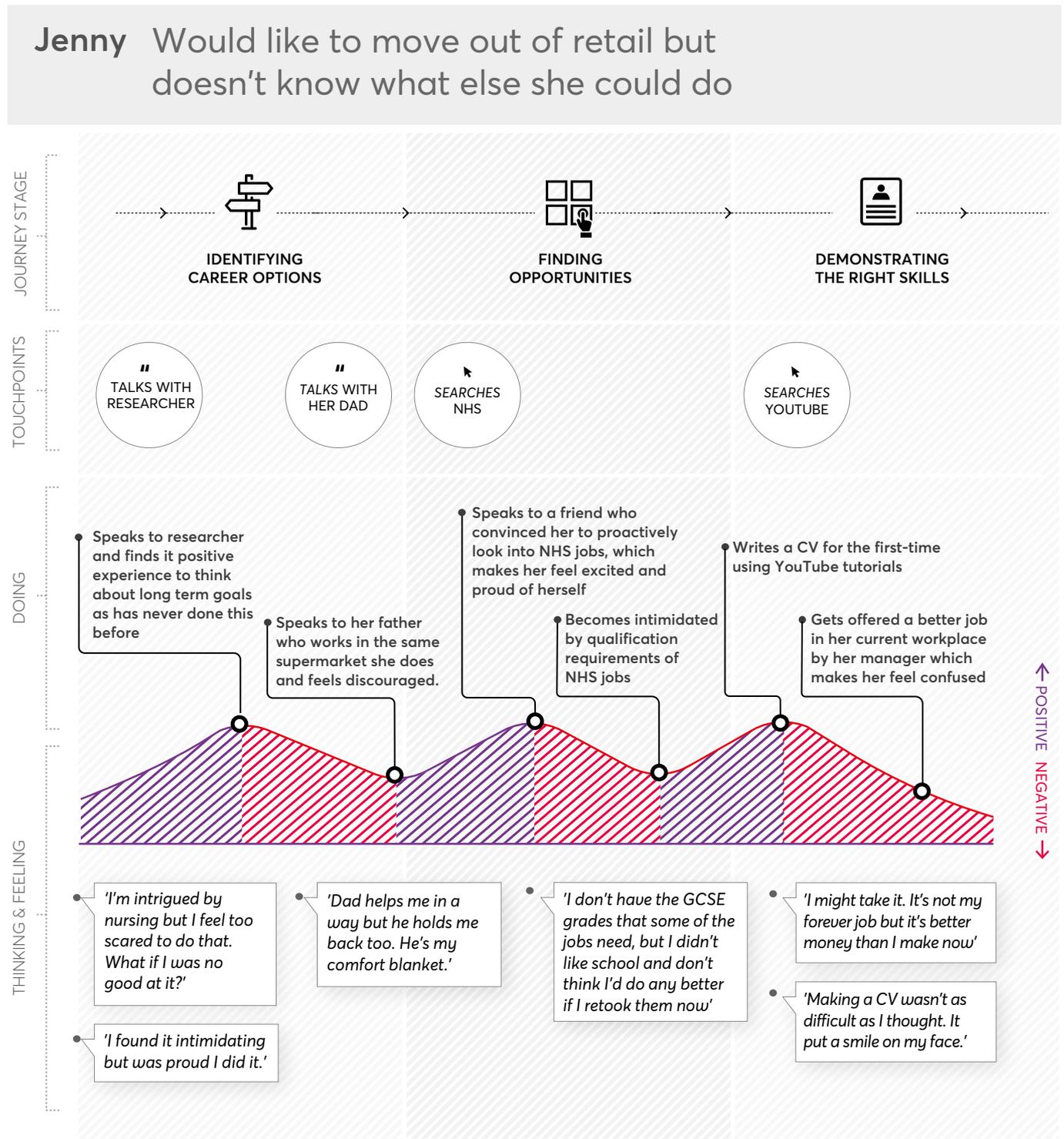
# 1. Opportunistic journey

Opportunistic journeys are characterised by their brevity, with few touchpoints marking the journey from one job to the next. Opportunistic career navigators tended to say that they had relatively little difficulty finding a job, particularly in the industry where they already worked. Many had moved regularly between different jobs within their sector and described this as quick and

easy to do. For the most part, they used informal methods to find and apply for jobs, with word of mouth and personal networks emerging as the preferred way to find work.

Job search sites were also popular as they made it easy for this group to find new opportunities and to keep an eye on a changing market.

FIGURE 3: OPPORTUNISTIC JOURNEY

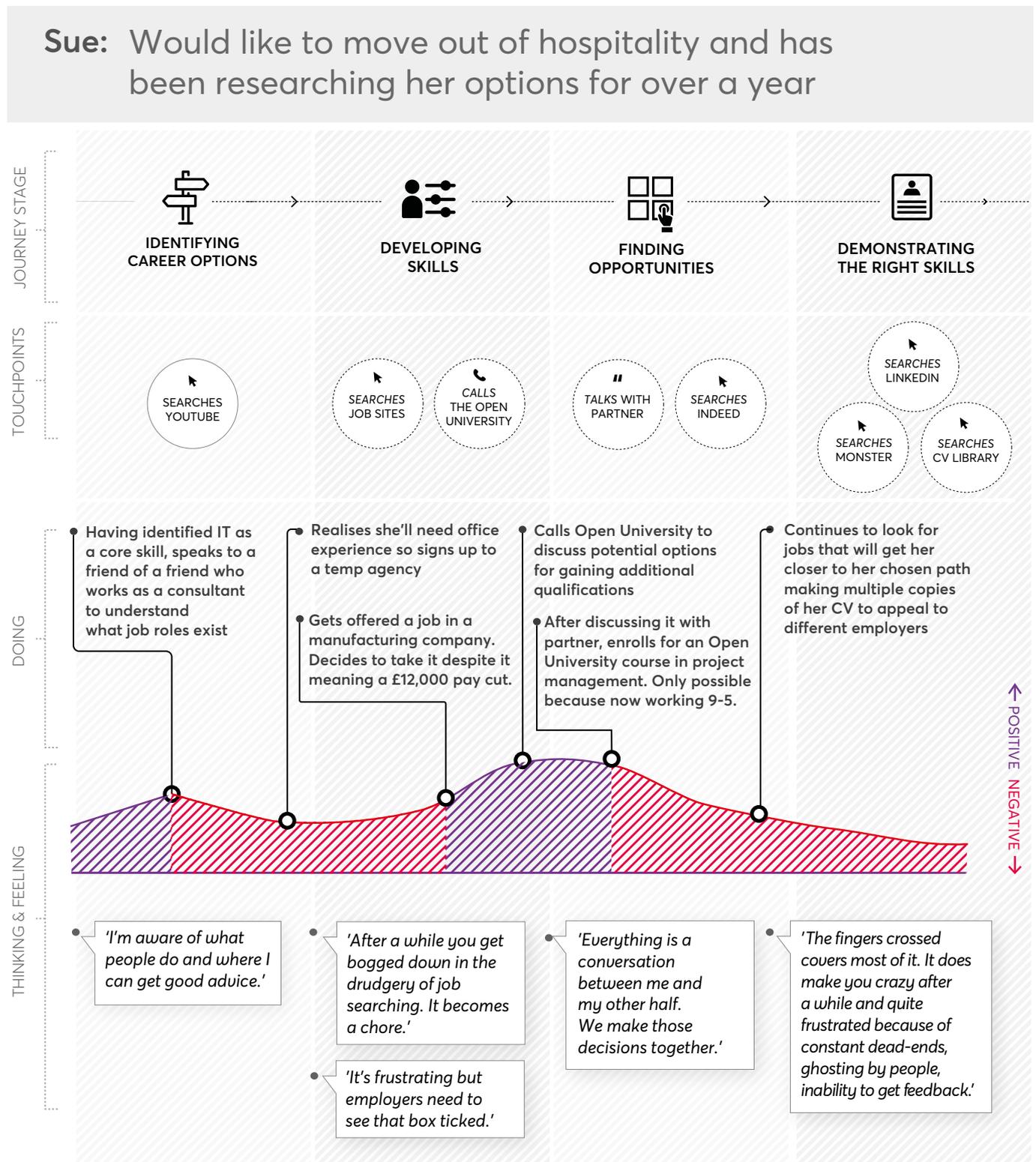


## 2. Strategic journey

Strategic journeys are more complex; they take more time and involve many more touchpoints. Those who adopted a strategic approach reported greater difficulty in reaching their goals.

They had to change the tactics they had used in their career up to this point in order to target a specific job. This can be a multi-staged process involving many emotional ups and downs.

FIGURE 4: STRATEGIC JOURNEY

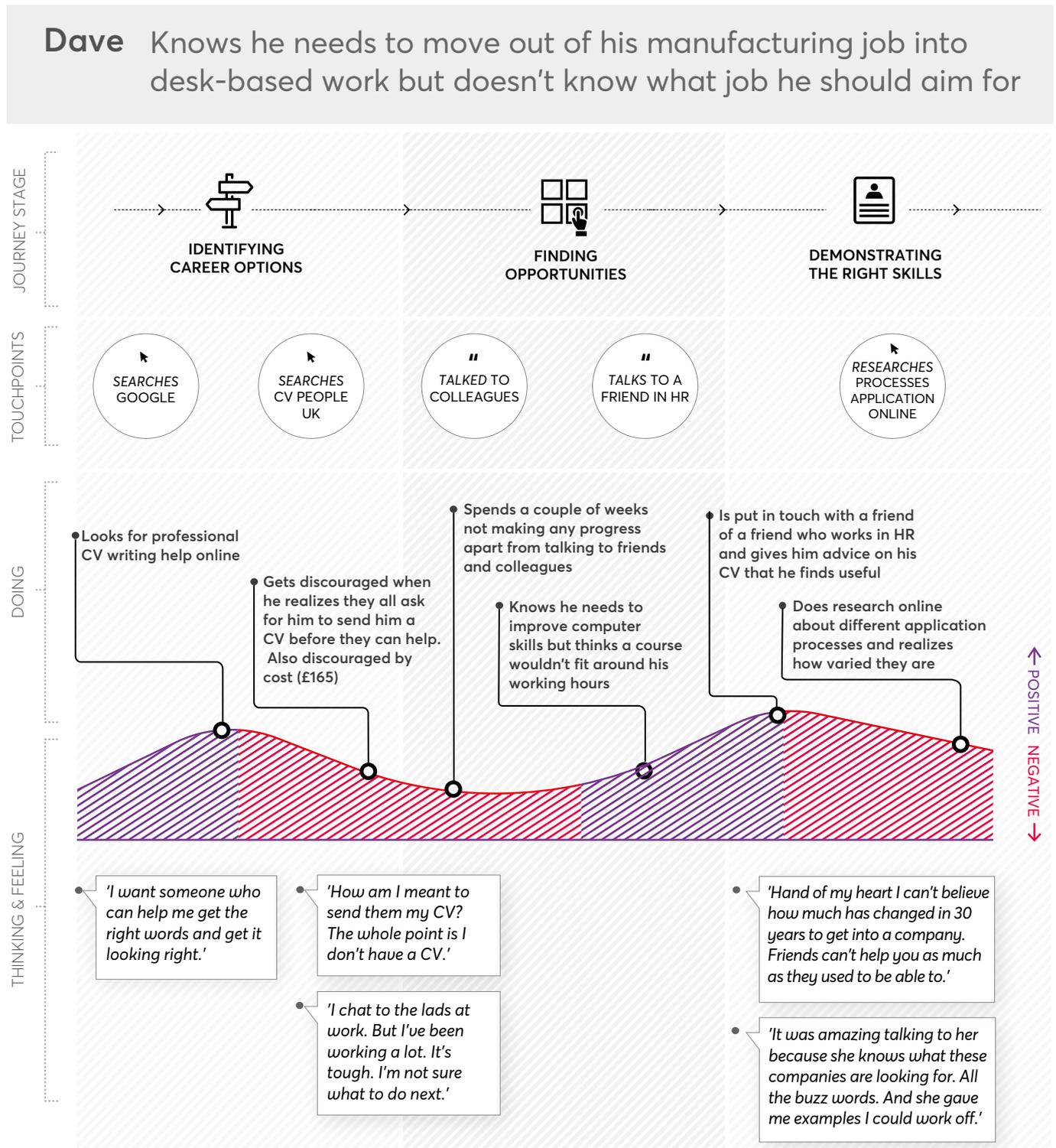


### 3. Stuck journey

Workers who felt 'stuck' faced the greatest challenges. They were in a position where they had to be strategic but did not feel well equipped for it. They had to learn new ways of doing things and to stretch themselves beyond what they were comfortable with. Many found this stressful and described the experience as

overwhelming. Members of this group were the most likely to struggle emotionally with the process. Many found the idea of going into the unknown very daunting. This could result in inertia meaning weeks could pass without them making any progress towards their goals.

FIGURE 5: STUCK JOURNEY



# 06

**The impact of the  
research on participant  
attitudes and behaviour**

In this section of the report, we reflect on the impact of the research process on participants' attitudes and behaviours around career navigation. While the incentives provided to participants to take part in the research will have encouraged a high level of engagement, we believe that the insights below will be of use to policymakers and service providers.

**Regular contact with a researcher gave structure to the job-seeking process, which participants said meant they made more progress in advancing their goals than they would otherwise have done**

*'The research has made me look more closely at where I want to go career wise. It has made me more proactive. You have given me deadlines, and I needed that. I have thought, I better get a look on then before I speak to you again.'*

**Having access to an impartial listener was identified by participants as one of the greatest benefits of the research**

Regular reflective conversations with an impartial listener helped the participants to integrate reflection into their career navigation journeys. Many felt this was something that had been missing from their experiences previously, as conversations with family and friends were often inflected with bias.

*'It's been a bit like therapy, I have chewed her [the researcher's] ear off about all the things that I have been thinking and all the things that have been annoying me. But it has also let me think about what I want to change.'*

**Asking workers to talk about someone they think is successful was a good way to get them to articulate their own goals**

When we asked people to talk about someone they thought was successful, most said someone they know personally, such as a family member or friend. Their reasons reflected their individual

priorities, such as salary or work/life balance. This exercise allowed participants to project their own goals without inhibition. It also provided a useful springboard to help them analyse the barriers they believed they face in achieving the same success.

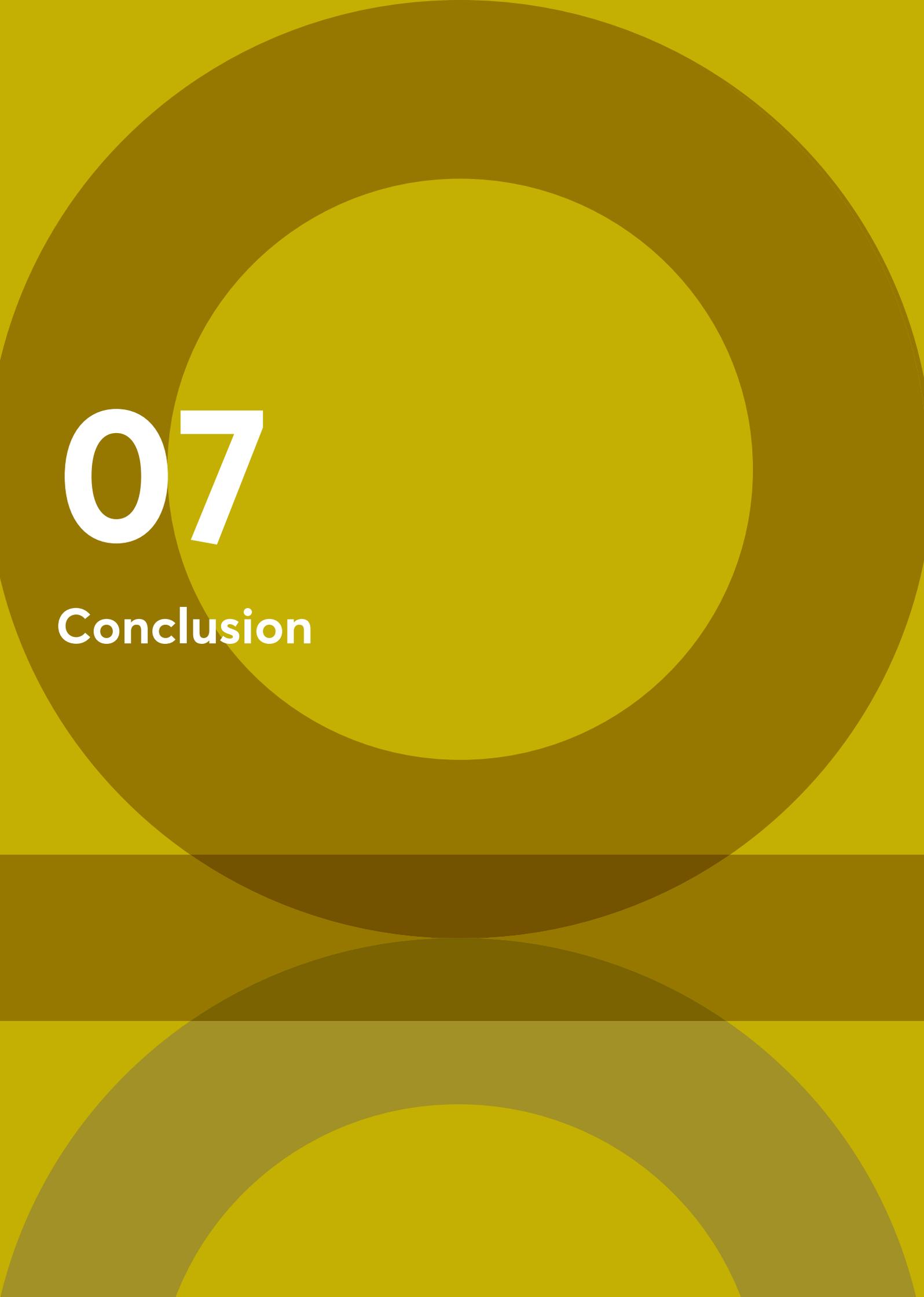
*'I think my sister has been successful because she has always been a confident person, whereas I would say what's holding me back is gut instinct and confidence.'*

**Workers found it easier to identify the skills of others than their own**

In the final workshop we presented participants with three different scenarios, each of which depicted a fictional character facing a different career navigation challenge. We asked participants to identify the skills that person had, and the strategy they should take in overcoming their challenge.

When considering other people, participants were quick to identify evidence of a good work ethic, adaptability, emotional intelligence and transferable skills, yet they struggled to identify these attributes in themselves. This demonstrates that projection can be a valuable exercise to get workers to think through their own situation without feeling inhibited or becoming dejected.

*'Identifying your own skills can be difficult. Looking at it from your own point of view, it's hard to identify. It's good when someone else says you done this and you done that. And to say you're good at it.'*



**07**

**Conclusion**

## The experiences of workers in Newport provide lessons about common challenges for career navigation – and clues for how they can be addressed.

As in other towns and cities in the UK, Newport's labour market is changing. Some occupations are in decline while others are growing. Some jobs offer security and opportunities for personal development while others are more precarious. The experiences of workers in Newport as they tried to find viable and desirable new roles in this context provide valuable lessons for those working to help the millions of others in occupations that face an uncertain future. These insights provide a foundation for the development of better services and policies to reduce unemployment, improve skills matching and streamline career transitions.

### 1. Career navigation is experienced as a costly, risky and demoralising process

The 18 workers we followed faced a number of common challenges that contributed to the friction of career navigation. These can be categorised under three headings: cost, risk and confidence.

#### Cost

1. Information about occupations and specific job opportunities often did not reflect the criteria that workers used to gauge whether a role was viable or desirable, leading to friction in the job application process and lost time.
2. Moving to a new sector was perceived to be a costly process, requiring time and money to retrain.

#### Risk

3. Workers feared that their employers might dismiss them if they were discovered looking for new opportunities.
4. Moving to a new sector was perceived to risk having to take an entry-level job, resulting in a lower salary.
5. Formal careers advice services, such as Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales, are stigmatised and workers were unwilling to be seen using them.

#### Confidence

6. Low confidence about their abilities was often a major barrier to workers feeling as though they had control of their careers.
7. Workers often struggled to identify and articulate their own skills in a way that would enable them to find viable alternative opportunities for work.
8. Digital tools, such as online job boards, were central to many workers' approaches to career navigation, but they can be challenging to use effectively.
9. Negative emotional experiences relating to job applications were a common barrier to strategic career navigation.

## 2. Better data about jobs and skills will lay the foundations for a labour market that allows workers and employers to adapt to uncertainty

Workers have complex criteria for making decisions about their careers, taking into account caring responsibilities, personal aspirations, and other individual concerns. As a result, they require a wide range of information about jobs and occupations. This information is often difficult to obtain, increasing both the time costs of career navigation and the likelihood that they will take jobs that are poorly matched to their skills. The information they need includes:

### Information about jobs, occupations and employers

- Location
- Salary
- Hours
- Contract type (for example: zero hours, full time, part time)
- Tasks
- First-hand experience of work
- Required qualifications
- Required skills
- The outlook for occupations and sectors

### Information about training and qualifications

- Appropriate courses
- Predicted return on investment

Compiling this data into a single resource would allow workers to explore career options more efficiently and identify viable and desirable roles. It would reduce the cost of career navigation, allow workers to assess the risks of different career decisions more confidently, and support their transition into jobs which make good use of their skills.

This information is the foundation of a more intelligent labour market that allows workers and employers to adapt to an uncertain future. To build this smarter system for jobs and skills, it is necessary for government, education providers, employers and job platforms to work together to generate, open up and share relevant information.

## 3. Targeted support and information can reduce the friction of career navigation

Better information alone cannot overcome the challenges above and reduce the friction of career navigation for the millions of workers facing job disruption in the UK. The research shows that targeted, trustworthy support is necessary to help workers make confident decisions about their careers and use information effectively.

### The support that workers receive should be tailored to their specific approach to career navigation

'Opportunistic' career navigators, often early in their working lives, are likely to require outreach based on specific trigger points to prompt them to consider changing roles if their occupation is at risk. They also need support to identify their own skills and understand how they match the demands of the labour market.

'Strategic' career navigators are already exploring a range of career options but require better information about the prospects of different jobs. This will help them evaluate their benefits and choose between pathways.

Workers who feel 'stuck' in career navigation will benefit from support to set clear milestones for their exploration of the job market. Many also require help to develop their digital skills for career navigation and new work environments.

### **A holistic approach to improving workers' career adaptability resources will help them to be more strategic in their career navigation**

Services which aim to help workers to find viable, desirable and secure roles should support them to develop the full range of career adaptability resources: concern, control, curiosity, confidence and commitment. Without them, the costs and risks of career navigation can seem insurmountable, and workers may not feel the impetus to search for new opportunities.

### **Services for career navigation will be more successful if they simulate the support offered by family and friends**

Workers rely heavily on personal connections for information and support in career navigation, despite being aware that these provide a narrow view of the job market. This is because advice and guidance offered by friends and family reduces the perception of career navigation as costly, risky and demoralising, and delivers a number of benefits that are unmatched by other sources of support. Services to support workers to adapt to a changing labour market should learn from the benefits below, and aim to simulate and complement them.

- **Targeted recommendations:** The abundance of information available online is difficult to filter and apply to their circumstances and needs, in contrast to information about jobs accessed through friends and family.
- **Explainable, trustworthy advice:** The advice provided by friends and family is delivered by trusted people who can be asked about the reasons for their recommendations and challenged on their rationale.
- **Supported self-reflection:** Workers can struggle to identify their own skills and aspirations, leaving them without the career confidence they need to explore the labour market and find appropriate roles. Support from family and friends helps workers to overcome this challenge, as their personal connections understand their background, circumstances and needs.
- **Discreet and informal support:** Research participants felt that being open about their career navigation activities can risk their current employment. Use of formal careers services such as the Jobcentre Plus or Careers Wales carries a social stigma. For this reason, workers are careful about the members of their social circle who they ask for support, and seek to limit the number of people who are aware of their job search.
- **Multidimensional information:** Online resources do not include information about the criteria that allow people to identify viable or desirable opportunities. Engagement with their social circle allows workers to gather much of this information simply and intuitively through dialogue. This reduces the risk that they will apply for a job that turns out to be a poor match.

# Checklist for improving workers' career navigation

The findings from this report can help providers of job search tools and careers guidance to target and deliver more effective services to workers in an uncertain labour market. We present 13 recommendations below as a checklist for improving workers' career navigation.

Many of these recommendations require the provision of relevant, reliable and up-to-date information about the supply and demand for skills within a changing labour market. To deliver this foundational resource, government, education providers, employers and job search platforms need to work together to generate, open up and share relevant information about jobs and skills.<sup>19</sup>

## Reduce the risks

- ✓ Clearly explain that the service use is confidential.
- ✓ Reassure users about relevant employment rights.

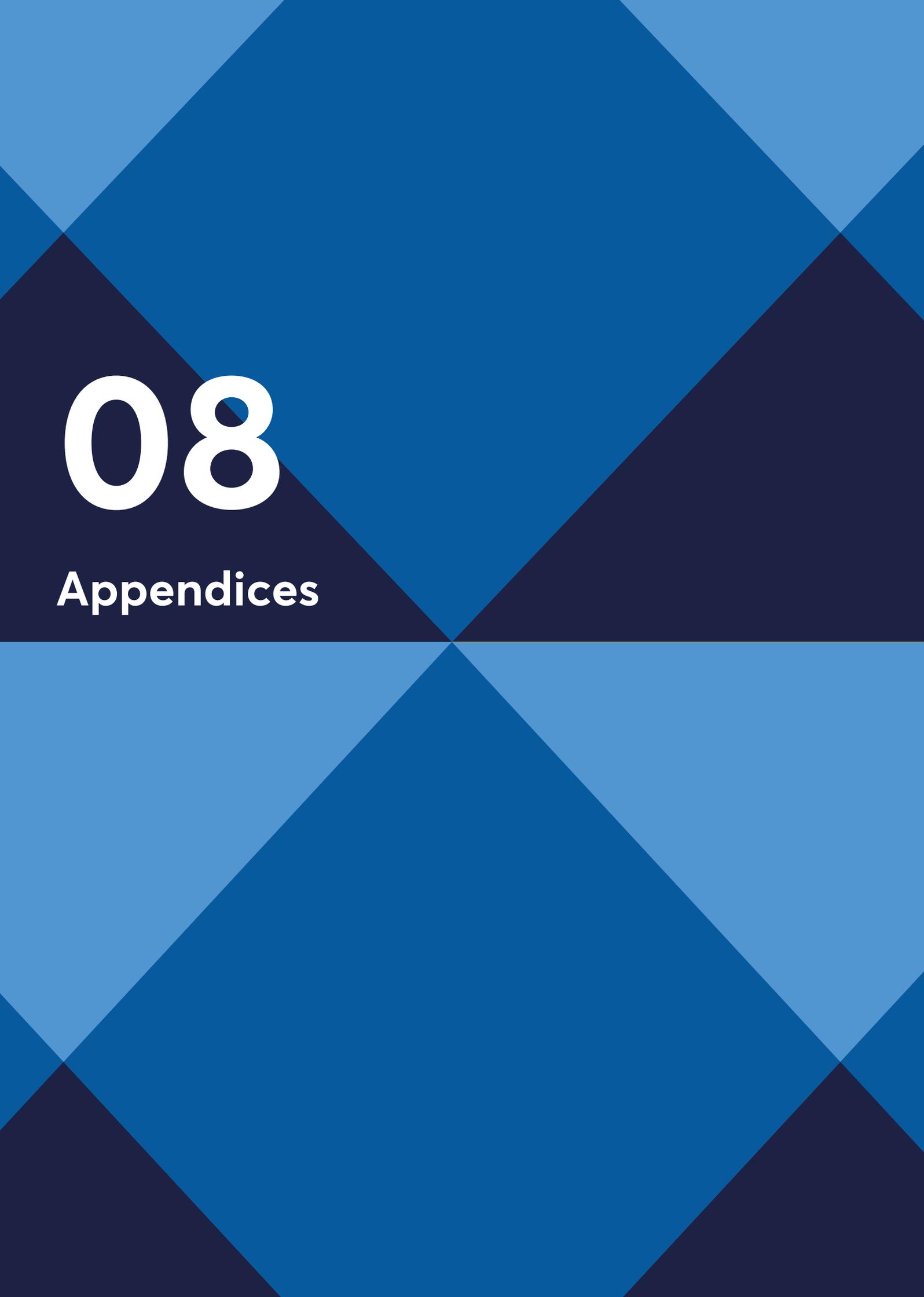
## Reduce the costs

- ✓ Use common triggers and touchpoints for career navigation to target workers facing uncertainty and make it easy for them to find the information and support they need.
- ✓ Allow users to filter information about jobs and occupations based on their own preferences.
- ✓ Provide multiple types of information about each job or occupation so that users can make an informed choice about whether to continue exploring a particular career pathway.
- ✓ Present clear advice on the qualifications, skills and relevant learning opportunities that can help workers to improve their salary prospects.

- ✓ Simplify the job application process for workers in order to cut the time it takes to apply.

## Build confidence

- ✓ Support self-reflection to allow users to identify their own skills and aspirations.
- ✓ Develop and demonstrate a clear understanding of the circumstances, skills and aspirations of users.
- ✓ Help users to understand how to match their skills and experience to a range of occupations, and support them to write CVs and cover letters to communicate this.
- ✓ Explain the reasons for career and job recommendations, taking into account the user's personal preferences.
- ✓ Provide support and milestones throughout the user's career navigation journey.
- ✓ Share the real stories of other workers or build support networks to help users recognise the common challenges of career navigation, and demonstrate that success is possible.



**08**

**Appendices**

# Appendix 1: Method

On 7 January 2020 an initial 90-minute focus group with eight Newport residents was undertaken in order to illuminate the context of living and working in the city.

After this, BritainThinks followed 18 new participants on their career navigation journeys over a six-week period between 27 January and 16 March 2020.

Researchers interacted with these participants through WhatsApp, enabling them to capture in the moment responses to experiences through a familiar and non-intrusive method of communication. Every week, participants completed a diary task outlining their feelings towards their current job and future work opportunities, and explaining what activity they had undertaken that week to explore new opportunities for work. This was supplemented with fortnightly telephone interviews to delve deeper into their responses.

In the second half of the research period participants were set additional tasks. We asked them to:

- Trial a new approach in their job search that they haven't tried before.
- Review stimulus prepared by the research team showing what tactics other research participants had been taking in the research.
- Think of a person they deemed to be successful in their career and identify what it was that had enabled that person to find success.

At the end of the six weeks, all participants were convened into a three-hour workshop, with the aim of prompting a collective reflection on their experience of career navigation and co-designing a prototype service to support them.<sup>20</sup>

## Benefits of this approach

This methodology allowed us to:

- **Investigate responses to uncertainty within a local labour market:** By choosing Newport as the research site, the researchers could build a deeper understanding of contextual factors that would not be captured in a nationwide study.
- **Gain a granular understanding of behaviours of workers:** By studying a small sample in great depth the researchers were able to build relationships with those in the sample and so gain greater understanding of what drives their behaviour.
- **Gain longitudinal data:** Tracking the participants through their career navigation journeys allowed the researchers to map their emotional responses and understand challenges as they were experienced.
- **Go beyond observation:** As well as observing spontaneous behaviour, the researchers were able to analyse the impact of additional information on participant behaviour, and the impact of peer to peer interaction on participants.
- **Have a meaningful impact on the lives of those taking part:** Throughout the research process we aimed to ensure that the experience of taking part in the research had a beneficial impact on participants.
- **Build on previous research:** The longitudinal, digitally connected approach distinguishes this research from earlier studies that have informed our work.<sup>21</sup>

# Appendix 2: Research participants

The eight focus group participants were recruited to be reflective of the age, gender, socio-economic group and ethnicity of the local area.

The 18 ethnographic research participants were all employed in roles and sectors (manufacturing, retail and hospitality) identified by Nesta<sup>22</sup> and the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee<sup>23</sup> as being particularly vulnerable to

disruption. To build a better understanding of workers whose jobs are most at risk, we chose to focus on workers with a salary below £30,000 per annum and with qualifications below level 4.<sup>24</sup>

All research participants were recruited with the support of a professional recruiter and provided with incentives to take part in the research.

Male, 24–35, full-time worker	- Managerial and sales for a door and window company
Female, 24–35, full-time worker	- Entry-level project management for a door company. Previously worked 10+ years in hospitality.
Female, 36–44, full-time worker	- Planning and logistics co-ordinator for a ventilation company
Male, 55+, full-time worker	- Managerial and sales in a fan manufacturer
Male, 45–55, full-time worker	- Manual: experienced steel worker
Male, 55+, part-time worker	- Manual: experienced steel worker
Male, 45–55, full-time worker	- Manual: experienced paint sprayer
Male, 36–44, full-time worker	- Manual: junior loader for a building materials company
Male, 24–34, full-time worker	- Manual: junior steel worker. Made redundant in first week of the research and moved into hospitality as a hotel barman
Female, 36–44, zero-hours contract worker	- Entry-level stock taker, supermarket
Female, 25–34, part-time worker	- Entry-level beautician
Female, 18–24, part-time worker	- Entry-level shop assistant, supermarket
Female, 35–44, part-time worker	- Entry-level shop assistant, supermarket
Female, 35–44, part-time worker	- Entry-level shop assistant, toy shop
Male, 18–24, full-time worker	- Team leader, supermarket
Male, 36–44, full-time worker	- Manager for an independent stationary shop
Female, 24–35, full-time worker	- Manager, supermarket
Male, 45–54, full-time worker	- Manager at a catering and events company

# Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Number of furloughed workers as of 21 June 2020. Source: HMRC coronavirus (COVID-19) statistics (Accessed 23 June 2020), <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hmrc-coronavirus-covid-19-statistics>.

<sup>2</sup> Hasan Bakhshi et al., *The Future of Skills: Employment in 2030* (London: Pearson and Nesta, 2017), <https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/the-future-of-skills-employment-in-2030/>.

<sup>3</sup> Ksenia Zheltoukhova et al., *Precarious to Prepared* (London: Nesta, 15 October 2019), <https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/precarious-to-prepared/>.

<sup>4</sup> Charlotte Alldritt and Andy Norman, *The Data Deficit: Why a lack of information undermines the UK skills system* (London: Centre for Progressive Policy, 2018), [https://www.progressive-policy.net/downloads/files/WJ3600\\_CPP\\_report\\_UK\\_Skills\\_SCREEN\\_PAGES.pdf](https://www.progressive-policy.net/downloads/files/WJ3600_CPP_report_UK_Skills_SCREEN_PAGES.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Industrial Strategy Council, *UK Skills Mismatch in 2030* (London: Industrial Strategy Council, October 2019), <https://industrialstrategyCouncil.org/sites/default/files/UK%20Skills%20Mismatch%202030%20-%20Research%20Paper.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Shigeru Fujita, Giuseppe Moscarini, Fabien Postel-Vinay, 'The labour market policy response to COVID-19 must save aggregate matching capital', *Vox CEPR Policy Portal*, 30 March 2020, <https://voxeu.org/article/labour-market-policy-response-covid-19-must-save-aggregate-matching-capital>.

<sup>7</sup> Jyl Djumalieva and Cath Sleeman, *Making sense of skills: A UK skills taxonomy* (London: Nesta and ESCOE, 2018), <https://data-viz.nesta.org.uk/skills-taxonomy/index.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Madeleine Gabriel et al., *Mapping "career causeways" for workers in the age of automation*, Nesta (blog), 11 February 2020, <https://www.nesta.org.uk/blog/mapping-career-causeways/>.

<sup>9</sup> Michèle Belot, Philipp Kircher and Paul Muller, 'Providing Advice to Jobseekers at Low Cost: An experimental study on online advice', *The Review of Economic Studies* 86, no. 4 (July 2019): 1411–1447, <https://doi.org/10.1093/restud/rdy059>.

<sup>10</sup> Centre for Cities, *Cities Outlook 2018* (London: Centre for Cities, January 2018), <https://www.centreforcities.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/18-01-12-Final-Full-Cities-Outlook-2018.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Centre for Cities, *Cities Outlook 2018*.

<sup>12</sup> Ryan O'Neill, 'The rise and fall of Newport's famous steelworks industry', *Wales Online*, last updated 4 May 2020, <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/newport-steel-industry-llanwern-history-18187818>.

<sup>13</sup> Jo Barnes, 'Newport: A region on the up – NatWest releases detailed report on region's economy', *South Wales Argus*, 23 July 2019, <https://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/17787769.newport-region---natwest-releases-detailed-report-regions-economy/>.

<sup>14</sup> 'Centre for Cities, 'Cities Outlook 2018'.

<sup>15</sup> Barnes, 'Newport: A region on the up'.

<sup>16</sup> The 2019 Nesta report, *Precarious to Prepared* (Zheltoukhova et al), presents three policy recommendations to accelerate the development of this smarter system for jobs and skills.

<sup>17</sup> These personas are based on the experiences of real individuals. Names and some details have been changed to protect their privacy.

<sup>18</sup> For more information, see Nesta's rapid evidence assessment: Jack Orlik, Benjamin Reid and Georgie Whiteley, *What motivates adults to learn?* (London: Nesta, 22 August 2019), <https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/what-motivates-adults-learn/>.

<sup>19</sup> The 2019 Nesta report, *'Precarious to Prepared'*, presents three policy recommendations to accelerate the development of this smarter system for jobs and skills: Zheltoukhova et al., *'Precarious to Prepared'*.

<sup>20</sup> This method was inspired by the work of Tawanna Dillahunt of the University of Michigan, who has been co-designing tools to empower low-resource job seekers in Detroit. See *'Publications'*, Tawanna Dillahunt, last modified 2020, <http://www.tawannadillahunt.com/research/>.

<sup>21</sup> Institute for Employment Studies, *Adult Career Decision-Making: Qualitative Research* (London: Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, September 2013), [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/252087/bis-13-1183-adult-career-decision-making-qualitative-research.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/252087/bis-13-1183-adult-career-decision-making-qualitative-research.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> Bakhshi et al., *'The Future of Skills'*.

<sup>23</sup> *'Industrial Strategy: Sector deals'*, UK parliament, 19 March 2019, <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmbeis/663/66302.htm>.

<sup>24</sup> The sample reflects the National Retraining Scheme Cohort, with the only difference being that the participants were located in Wales, rather than England.

All emojis designed by OpenMoji – the open-source emoji and icon project. License: CC BY-SA 4.0. The colors of all emojis have been adjusted to match the Nesta brand colors.

Lines and shape of the following emojis have been graphically adjusted: Eyes (1F440), thumbs down (1F44E), crossed fingers (1F91E) by Julian Grüneberg, tired face(1F62B) by Mariella Steeb, thinking face (1F914), grinning face (1F600), thinking face (1F914) by Emily Jäger, person facepalming (1F926), person shrugging (1F937) by Johanna Wellnitz, yawning face (1F971) by Laura Dworatschek.