The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

Acknowledgements

Glossary

Acronyms

BIS – Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

CV – Curriculum Vitae

HMP – Her Majesty's Prison

HR – Human Resources

IAG – Information, Advice and Guidance

NCS – National Careers Service

NOMS – National Offender Management Service

ROTL – Release on Temporary Licence

Technical terms

Exploratory decision-making: career decision-making undertaken after testing ideas out through experience and reflecting on the outcomes.

Impulsive decision-making: career decision-making taken in an emotional or instinctive way with little thought or reflection about the real options available or the consequences of the decision.

Opportunistic decision-making: career decision-making undertaken by responding to opportunities as they arise, sometimes taking opportunities pointed out by others.

Passive decision-making: taking career decisions by reacting to the choices presented and typically being strongly influenced by others.

Pragmatic rationality: A concept developed by Hodkinson (2008). The adjective pragmatic is used to distinguish this sort of decision making from the technically rational version assumed in economics. Pragmatically rational career decisions involve the physical, practical emotional and the affective, as well as the cognitive. They are based on partial information and can involve several people. The term notes that the extent to which a person can influence his/her own career is strongly affected by their position in the field and the resources at their disposal.

Prison categories (male): Male prisons are categorised according to their security status. Category A prisons are for those prisoners whose escape would be highly dangerous to the public or national security. Category B prisons hold those offenders whose escape needs to be made very difficult but who do not require maximum security. Prisoners in Category C prisons are unlikely to attempt to escape but could not be fully trusted in an

open prison environment. Category D prisons allow their inmates out on 'Release on Temporary Licence' so that they can work or study at further education colleges.

Prison categories (female): Reflecting the categories of male prisons, women's prisons have categories which are Restricted Status, Closed and Open.

Rational decision-making: A decision-making process that is based on making choices that result in the most optimal level of benefit or utility for the individual. Most conventional economic theories are created and used under the assumption that all individuals taking part in an action/activity are behaving rationally.

Resettlement pathways: These were defined by the then government in response to the Social Exclusion Unit's report, '*Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners'.* The pathways provide a focus for resettlement activity by prisons and associated agencies and comprise*:* Accommodation; Education, training and employment; Health; Drugs and alcohol; Finance, benefit and debt; Children and families; and Attitudes, thinking and behaviour. The Corston Report on working with vulnerable women in prisons suggested two more pathways for female offenders: Support for women who have been abused, raped or who have experienced domestic violence; and Support for women who have been involved in prostitution.

Restorative justice: An approach in which the victim/survivor and offender, and in some cases other persons affected by a crime, participate actively together in the resolution of matters arising from the crime, generally with the help of a facilitator.

Strategic decision-making: career decision-making undertaken after a period of self-reflection, seeking out information and consulting others and deliberately weighing up factors influencing the decision.

Virtual Campus: The Virtual Campus is a secure intranet that supports and enhances delivery of learning and skills provision to learners in custody. It facilitates a multi-agency approach to e-learning in the secure estate and preparation for release. It offers learners the opportunity to use interactive learning materials, helping to improve employment opportunities on release from prison.

List of tables and figures

List of tables

List of figures

Contents

Summary

This report presents the findings of research into adult career decision-making. The study was undertaken by the Institute for Employment Studies and explores how adults make career decisions and their awareness, use of and satisfaction with the support available. The research was qualitative and included a literature review. The study consisted of 50 depth interviews with adults making career decisions, including some who had used the National Careers Service (NCS) and others who had not. Additionally research was undertaken with prisoners: 15 interviews were carried out in three prisons.

The review of literature found that the decision-making process is a complex construct and one that individuals do not undertake using 'rational' behaviour. Behavioural science describes this by separating information processing done by System 1 (which is automatic) and that done by System 2 (which is cognitive). Individuals are not aware of what the automatic part of the brain is doing and when they make decisions, much of the information processing has been done by System 1 before System 2 starts. Therefore people can rule out pieces of information and options before they start to consciously think about making a decision. Evidence from the field of careers (the theory of planned happenstance), explores the influence of chance events in career decision-making. In the event of uncertainty, the theory advocates the exploration of different professions and environments with the potential opening of unexpected career and job opportunities. These and other theories and evidence presented in the literature were taken into account in the development of the research tools and analysis framework.

Factors influencing career decisions

To understand the career decision-making process, it is vital to identify and understand what influences career decisions as this is the context in which career decisions are made. These influences can limit or frame available choices and also affect how an individual is likely to make a career decision.

Career decisions tend to be taken within the **context of family**. There were many examples of interviewees moving area or even country for their partner's career. The financial situation of interviewees was intertwined with those of their partners. The affordability of work and learning was discussed in the context of the household budget. For those with children, how best to balance paid work and childcare responsibilities tended to be a joint decision.

Some interviewees had clear ideas of their career or **aspiration**, and others did not. This was not necessarily related to age: some young people had clear career goals and others did not, and indeed some adults in their mid-career were still not sure of their career goal. Interviewee's **career values** and what they wanted from work changed throughout their life. Common career values were security, service or dedication to a cause or lifestyle, and enjoyment and work interest. Lifestyle career choices were more prevalent among younger people, and through mid-life, security and stability tended to become more important.

A few interviewees had **health** problems and these had had various impacts on their careers. Mental and physical illness could lead to job loss, prolonged periods of unemployment and constrained career choices. Related to health was an individual's **psychological orientation**. How all interviewees felt about themselves and their life more generally influenced their career decision-making, and particularly affected respondents' belief that they could affect career change. A lack of **confidence** could lead to a downward spiral, whereby interviewees closed down work and learning opportunities. More positively orientated interviewees tended to be open to change and felt more ready to take career decisions when they presented.

Success, or otherwise in **education**, and the **experience of learning** could affect an individual's self-confidence. Many individuals held a portfolio of qualifications gained throughout their lives. Interviewees tended to value qualifications and felt they were important signals about what they could offer in the labour market. Some interviewees had progressed their career through learning. However, there were respondents who wanted to further their studies, but were constrained by **access to finance**. This was particularly an issue for people in their mid-career.

Figure S.1 summarises the influences on adult career decision-making found in this study and how they relate to career decision-making. The model has two halves, denoting towards the top and left, factors that are more internal to the individual (i.e. concern the way they see themselves, their situation and careers) and towards the bottom and right, factors which are more external to the individual (i.e. the wider environment). Several influencing factors sit at the join of internal/external influences. The three darker boxes represent key sets of **opportunities and constraints**. One set (on the left) relates to the individual, the second (on the right) to the world of work, and the third (at the bottom) to wider social and systemic opportunities and constraints. The four lighter boxes illustrate the four sets of **key career issues** that individuals address in their decision-making process. The arrows between each factor and career decision-making at the centre illustrate how the factor interacts with career decision-making. The key career issues tend to be determined by the individual and have a two-way relationship with career decision-making, denoted by a double-headed arrow. The sets of opportunities and constraints tend to be more factual and relate to an individual's circumstances. These are illustrated relating to career decision-making by a zigzag, denoting a relationship, but with less direct control by the individual.

Figure S.1: Influences on adult career decision-making

Internal

How am I feeling about myself and my life generally? Psychological orientation: Optimism, resilience, openness to change, attitude to risk, proactivity v passivity, confidence

What can I offer? Education, qualifications, and skills: specific and transferable skills, employability, job search skills, cultural capital (understanding of specific fields or sectors of work), career history, work experience

Personal circumstances opportunities and constraints: including family responsibilities and relationships, health, finance, housing, criminal record, other interests outside work, life stage / age

Career decision-making How is a decision triggered? What am I deciding? How do I approach a decision?

Labour market and learning opportunities and constraints: current employment situation, labour market understanding (incl. horizon of view), financial costs and support available

How do I see my future career? Career, work and learning identity and goals: Goal clarity, career identity, career insight and reflection, Career values, interests, attitude to work and learning, choices about work-life balance, time frames

Social and systemic opportunities and constraints: social and cultural norms and expectations, employer attitudes and workplace culture, working practices, influences of the views of others on decisions

What and who can inform my choice? Sources of information and support: Friends and family, Social networks; learning providers; National Careers Service; electronic resources

External

Source: IES, 2013

Sources of information and support for career decision-making

Sources of information and support offer individuals short-cuts in career decision-making, a feature that the literature from behavioural science found to be common in decision-making. Generally, individuals were supported by several people at once, or at least over the course of their career. **Family and friends** were an important source of support for work and learning decisions. Families could sometimes set expectations which influenced interviewees. Expectations could encourage individuals to achieve more, but equally they could discourage individuals from taking action in case of failure or indeed could push them to rebel and take a contrary path. Expectations set the frameworks within which individuals made decisions and took action. At times these expectations were rooted in family tradition and seen as a responsibility, but could also reflect wider social norms about what is the normal or right thing to do.

Most interviewees used **internet-based resources** to inform their career decision-making. The most commonly mentioned use was finding and applying for jobs. In a few cases, interviewees accessed more practical support online such as chatting online to an advisor,

and using tools to build a curriculum vitae (CV) or assess their skills. Most users were positive about the internet in supporting career decisions as it was something in their control that could be accessed at the right time and pace for them. However there were some concerns around the reliability and currency of the data, and that using the internet effectively required both technical and research skills.

A small group of interviewees reported using **formal careers services** – accessed via social workers, learning providers or Jobcentre Plus. In a few cases this was the National Careers Service (NCS), although many interviewees were either unaware that this support was being delivered by NCS or were unaware of the support that they could access via NCS. Several interviewees felt the career support they had received was with job search skills, including CV writing, but that they did not get sufficient support helping them to make sense of their opportunities and constraints, and to develop an understanding of their interests and preferences.

How adults make career decisions

Some career 'decisions' were exploratory and without a clear time boundary and others were more concrete in their nature. There were varied reasons for making a career decision. Decision-points could come out of the blue, such as bereavement, or could build up over time, such as feeling unsupported and pressured at work. There were also critical points in the life course when interviewees were making career decisions. These included the period after leaving school, college or university, a few years into working life, times when respondents were starting a family, and a few years prior to retirement when respondents of this age reported refocusing on what they wanted from the remainder of their working life.

There were five distinct approaches to career decision-making evident among interviewees: strategic; exploratory; opportunistic; impulsive; and passive. The key characteristics of each decision-making style are summarised in Table S.1.

Table S.1: Overview of the characteristics of decision-making styles

Decision-making style	Characteristics of the decision-making style
Strategic	Reflective about self; systematic; seeking out information and consulting others; deliberate weighing up of factors influencing the decision.
Exploratory	Reflective after periods of experience; testing ideas through experience; evaluating how they feel about experiences; can be pro-active in looking for opportunities.
Opportunistic	Reactive; responding to opportunities; often taking opportunities pointed out by others
Impulsive	Emotional; instinctive; often taking very quick decisions with little or no thought about real options or the consequences of decision.
Passive	Laid back; drifting; reacting to choices presented; strongly influenced by others in their choices.

Source: IES, 2013

The career decision-making process that individuals used was affected by the extent to which they explored wider options for work and learning, and the extent to which they looked ahead and reflected on and understood their own interests and preferences. These form the axes in Figure S.2 which presents an overview of career decision-making styles. Active interviewees tended to reflect on, maintain and develop some or all of the influences on career decision-making within their control, whereas passive interviewees were more constrained in these terms.

Figure S.2: Overview of career decision-making styles
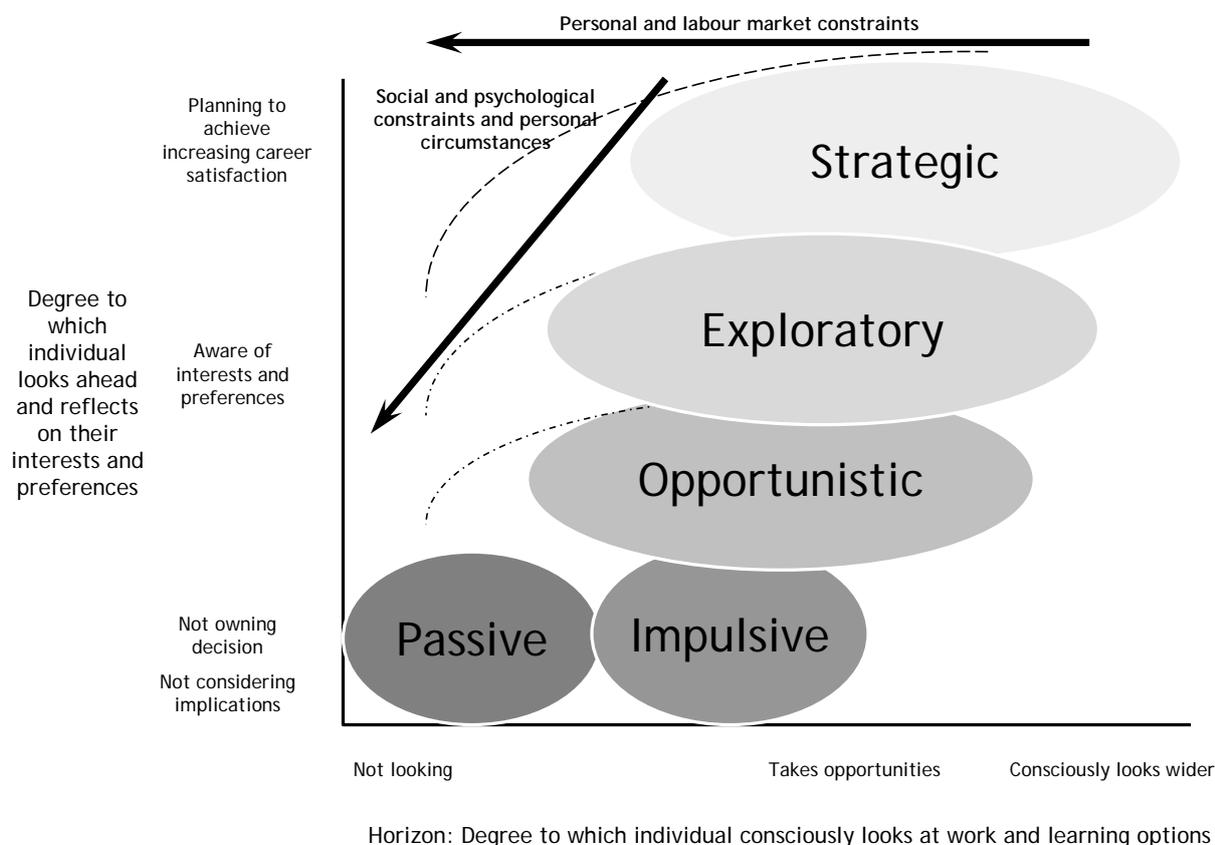
Source: IES, 2013

Within each decision-making style there was a spectrum of the extent to which interviewees consciously looked outwards, denoted in Figure S.2 by the dotted lines. Both personal and labour market constraints tend to drive individuals leftward on the diagram into considering narrower and close at hand labour market or learning options. Social and psychological constraints as well as personal circumstances tend to push individuals downwards and negatively affect the extent to which they believe they can exercise control over their lives. These are the factors described in Figure S.1. Constraints seem to make it more difficult for individuals to have a long-term horizon with regards to decision-making. Some individuals used the same decision-making styles over time, but others reflected on the outcomes of past career decisions made using a particular style and were actively trying to deploy a different career decision-making style in future.

The career decision-making of prisoners

In general, the people we interviewed in prison did not define their journey as a 'career' and for many their behaviour, their crime and their time in prison loomed large in their narrative. Some had followed a fairly typical career path before their sentence, with occupation changes along the way. Other interviewees' early careers had been dominated by petty crime and no steady employment. One group of interviewees had fragmented

work histories, with work interspersed with spells in prison and abuse of drugs and/or alcohol. Several of the interviewees had their own businesses prior to their sentence and expected to return to these on their release.

There was little evidence of interviewees having a specific career goal or field of work in mind from a young age, most seemed to have worked in jobs that came their way, or to have been guided by other work values, such as the desire to manage their own business. The extent, and at times precarious nature, of their experience of self-employment and business ownership seemed to have added to the sense of rapid change and uncertainty in many of the narratives. In general, prisoners did not reflect on past career experiences except where, as a result of their reflection during their sentences, they had drawn lessons from past mistakes. Most focused on how to move on from their past offending behaviour.

The prison environment provides a focus on self reflection and this space had resulted in several interviewees reconsidering their values and priorities, both with what they wanted from work in the future and much more broadly in terms of how to rebuild family relationships and how to live their lives in the future. Whilst the context may be very different from most people's experience, prisoners are balancing the same types of issues as the main stage population, although they may be more constrained in their circumstances and opportunities and place greater emphasis on some of the factors influencing career decision-making, such as the consequences of drug addiction.

Several interviewees reported that they had poor experiences of school, with experiences of exclusion not uncommon, and they typically had low or no qualifications from compulsory schooling. Many had or were improving their qualifications within the prison setting. Several interviewees talked about the support they provided to other prisoners, either help when they first arrive, pastoral support, help with basic skills, or help with housing. Prisoners worked as peer mentors, outreach orderlies, Listeners, trainers, and drugs/solvent abuse counsellors.

Prior to their time in prison, sources of advice and support had included family, friends, their partners and wider influences including teachers and school careers advisers. Some interviewees also talked about the negative influences of peers on their choices and decisions, and how they influenced key decisions that led them into criminal activity. When in prison, family and friends remained a source of information, advice and support for dealing with their period in custody and particularly when making plans for their release. Much of the support for work and learning decisions came from prison and agency staff and, to some extent, from other prisoners. Prisoners can access informal advice from prison or external provider staff more or less on demand, and certainly at short notice.

For those interviewees who could focus on work and learning, and were not overwhelmed by other things such as recovering from drug addiction, the prisoners interviewed in the study seemed to approach their career decisions in much the same way as the general population. Some were and had been very passive in their behaviour; others were opportunistic, making the most of business and work opportunities that came their way; and others were trying to be strategic in their approach.

Delivery implications for career guidance and support

This research has important implications for the provision of career guidance and support, whether through public services or other providers.

A. Improve awareness and understanding of career support

The majority of interviewees actively sought advice from others (section 4.2) and the literature suggests that sources of information and advice offer individuals short-cuts in decision-making (section 2.1). Figure S.2 illustrated that individuals need to look broadly at their career options, to seek information and to understand their interests if individuals are to use strategic, exploratory, and opportunistic decision-making styles most effectively. Clearly, career advice has a role in supporting people to develop this understanding. However, there was a low level of awareness of formal sources of career support in our sample (section 4.2.4). Therefore publicly funded careers services need much clearer and more visible marketing if they are to be used by all adults who would like career advice when making work and learning decisions. How to improve awareness and understanding of career support is considered in delivery implications A1 and A2.

A1: Improve awareness and understanding of career support

Co-located careers services need to retain their distinctiveness and be seen to be independent from the services they co-locate with.

The career support offer and associated branding needs to remain consistent over a number of years. Adults will therefore know where to return to for support throughout their career.

A2: Link to public career websites from other (commercial) websites

To improve awareness and understanding of the services available to support career decision-making, careers services could advertise and link from career-related sites that individuals are already using, such as recruitment websites. This would drive traffic to publically-funded career websites.

B. Enhancing adviser supported career decision-making

Interviewees who had used career support felt there was too much emphasis on job-getting skills (such as CV writing), especially if they were quite good at getting jobs but were in jobs they did not find satisfying (section 4.2.4). This is considered further in delivery implication B1.

Increasing the ability of individuals to self-serve and make effective career decisions in the future will help to manage the long-term costs of delivering career support. Career support should encourage behaviours, such as researching and looking widely at options and reflecting on interests and preferences that were shown in Figure S.2 to be key skills in encouraging strategic, exploratory and opportunistic decision-making styles. These are skills which can be taught as part of the process of career guidance and are considered in delivery implication B2. The theory of planned happenstance (section 2.1) highlights how individuals can use chance events as a positive platform for career development.

Many of the interviewees had an extremely narrow understanding of the occupations and job roles they might be able to do (section 4.1.1). Much of their labour market understanding came from job advertisements (section 4.2.1). Very few people deliberately sought out people who could tell them about specific labour markets and this was not a topic that respondents tended to ask themselves career questions about (section 5.1). This issue is considered in delivery implication B3. As in the wider sample, most prisoners had a narrow labour market understanding. Where they were interested in a new occupation, they did not seem to have researched it very much (section 6.3.1), displaying the characteristics of satisficing (settling for an adequate rather than optimal selection) highlighted in the wider literature (section 2.1). Outside prison, going to see people is a natural way of doing labour market research. Inside prison, other methods will be needed and this is considered in delivery implication B4.

B1: Provide support based on individual need

Consider the balance between supporting individuals with job-getting skills and a 'work-first' approach (such as CV writing), and providing career support that will help them to further develop insights.

The funding of career support should sufficiently reflect the diversity of needs and give flexibility to providers to best meet the varied needs of their clients to best support their career decision-making.

Career resources need to reflect the range of decision-making styles and acknowledge that some individuals will be making decisions in an opportunistic or exploratory way for example, rather than being overtly strategic (ordered, list-making etc).

B2: Develop individuals' career decision-making skills

Careers services should continue to offer access to services through a range of channels (web, telephone and face-to-face) reflecting the different levels of self-reliance of career decision-makers. These channels need to be linked and to build the career management and decision-making skills of individuals in order to increase the likelihood they will be able to self-serve in future.

The model of career decision-making styles developed in this research (Figure S.2) could be used to train advisers to deal with different decision-making styles.

B3: Widen opportunity awareness

Career support should help individuals to understand a range of feasible work and learning options. Careers advisers should encourage individuals to make better use of formal sources of information but also to utilise wider social networks, and make contact with people working in a job they think they might be suited to.

Careers services could signpost to other organisations to support the wider context of career decision-making, for example, signposting to business support organisations for individuals wanting to start a business or to become self-employed.

B4: Enhance support for prisoner's career decision-making

Prisons could consider how best to join-up the various individuals and organisations giving career support, including Listeners, mentors and advice services, as well as the NCS, in order to improve coherence.

Consider how prisoners making career decisions could have access to information about jobs without needing internet access, for example via video clips of people's work experiences.

C. Enhancing and deploying web-based tools to support decision-making

There is probably much more useful support online than most of those in our sample were using as many used it primarily for job search (section 4.2.3). Our analysis of decision-making styles illustrated in Figure S.2 showed that passive and impulsive career decision-makers are less likely to seek out information overall and tend to have the lowest awareness of their interests and preferences. Likewise behavioural science research evidences how individuals use mental short-cuts to reduce the burden of career decision-making (section 2.1). This highlights a need for career support services to 'push' information to individuals that may not be seeking it or who may struggle to access it. Looking at job vacancies did not really help individuals to obtain a higher level appreciation of labour market trends (section 4.2.3). Career labour market information needs to be both high level, outlining overall industry trends, and detailed about day to day experience. Others want to know what working in a sector or occupation would be like more generally. The delivery implications of this are considered in C1 and C3.

Sources of formal advice seemed to be more visible in prison than outside it (section 7.2). So here the issue may not be so much about lack of awareness but whether prisoners fully understand the career advice which is available to them and whether they use it at appropriate times. For example, those prisoners dealing with substance abuse may need to make considerable progress with their health before they feel ready to talk about work and learning issues (section 6.2.2 *Physical and mental health and disability*). Readiness to receive career support among prisoners and the rest of the population is considered in delivery implication C2.

C1: Help people find what they need online

Consideration could be given to the application of technologies that could 'push' appropriate and relevant career information to individuals according to their needs and preferences to help them make their own sense of the opportunities and challenges open to them, through alerts on new or changed web-based information and resources.

C2: Use the findings from this study to help people develop their decision-making skills

Assuming adults know more about where services might be available, the model of influences on career decision-making presented in this study (Figure S.1) could be adapted to an online 'toolkit' resource, to encourage individuals to question themselves and others in order to develop self-awareness prior to speaking to a careers adviser or others, including friends and family.

C3: Make best use of existing labour market information

Consider how careers services can make best use of local labour market data and intelligence available to Local Enterprise Partnerships and others.

Consider whether 'open access' career information in a format similar to Wikipedia with multiple users providing authorship and updates could be of benefit in providing real-time information and capturing the real life experience of working in specific sectors.

D. Building capability to deliver better career support

Some individuals in this study had received their most valuable career support from (sometimes fairly junior) staff in other services they were using, for example housing. They were likely to have had more contact with such staff than with fully qualified professionals and also to have known them for longer (section 4.2.5).

D1: Develop and enhance the right skills in wider services to support career decision-making

Professional associations for career practitioners, such as The Career Development Institute, could work with partners to develop awareness among professionals in a range of public services that give career support to individuals about how to best help individuals in their work and learning decisions and to effectively signpost to career support.

Professional associations for career practitioners and their partners could develop and publicise training materials and courses for those in other personal service occupations to acquire a higher level of skill in supporting individuals with their career decision-making challenges.

---

1 Introduction and background

This chapter sets out the background to career Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) provision in England, including the provision in a prison setting, before setting out the aims of this research and detailing the methodology.

1.1 Information, Advice and Guidance provision in England

The National Careers Service (NCS) built on the previous Next Step and Careers Advice Service, and launched in 2012 to provide high quality careers information and independent professional advice and guidance (BIS, 2012). It is a comprehensive resource on advice and guidance material, apprenticeships, higher education programmes, learning and funding opportunities that while focused mainly on adults, is also open to young people. The service is accessible through a multitude of channels including advice centres, Jobcentre Plus, libraries, housing associations, further education colleges, online, via telephone and mobile as well as online chat.

Jobcentre Plus, training providers and the NCS are expected to work collaboratively to meet local skills and employment needs, building on previous initiatives to create a more integrated employment and skills system. The NCS targets several priority groups (including those distant from the labour market) who can receive up to three free face-to-face careers guidance sessions. Any adult aged 19 or over, who approaches the NCS can receive one free face-to-face careers guidance session (Hayes, 2012). The network of organisations funded by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) can also offer services on the open market to those individuals/organisations which are willing to pay (Hayes, 2011). In contrast to the large scale TV marketing campaigns for learndirect, which generated nearly half of all calls (Page et al., 2007), the NCS has not had such high profile marketing since its launch, which may affect awareness of and demand for the service.

'The Right Advice at the Right Time' (BIS, 2012) set out the criticality of providing support to individuals to help them deal with the demands of a changing economy and to find satisfying and sustainable work. The NCS therefore has six programme objectives: to improve the quality of careers advice; to increase demand for learning economically valuable skills; to improve the supply of learning; to increase progression in work, or into employment and in life; to increase the number of people actively managing their own careers; and to promote the joy and value of learning.

Careers support for adults in England is also delivered by private and voluntary sector organisations. Private sector career consultants, employers, recruitment companies, voluntary and community sector organisations, training and learning providers also offer individuals career support. Other publicly-funded advisers, such as those in Jobcentre Plus, and informal support from family, friends and colleagues have also been identified as sources of careers advice in a recent evidence review (UKCES, 2011). The 2010 National Adult Learner Survey (NALS) asked individuals seeking information and advice in relation to learning which sources they used. Employers were the most common sources of IAG

for formal and non-formal courses (reported by 40 per cent of learners), followed by family and friends (20 per cent) and educational institutions (15 per cent). At the time of the NALS 2010 survey, the website delivery of the NCS was delivered through the Careers Advice Service (mentioned by one per cent of learners as a source of information and advice). The telephone and face-to-face delivery channels were not mentioned (BIS, 2012b). This illustrates the reliance on informal sources of IAG by most individuals.

Schools have a statutory obligation to make careers advice accessible to their students. This includes advice on the full range of further and higher education as well as apprenticeships. How this provision is met is left to the schools to allow for tailoring of the provision. Further education colleges and universities have strong commitments to their students to facilitate their transition into the labour market after completion of the course, but also play a vital role in helping prospective students to chose the right course (eg open days).

The rise and convergence of online media has opened new pathways for the delivery of Information, Advice and Guidance services on the one hand, and for career exploration activities on the other. The currently available technology is mainly used in three ways: to deliver information, to provide automated interaction, and to provide a communication channel (Hooley et al., 2012a). The use of digital technologies (e.g. the internet and smart phones) may however depend on such factors as digital literacy, culture, education and skills, rather than pure considerations of accessibility.

1.2 IAG in prisons

Learning and skills improvements of offenders have long been considered a fruitful strategy to prevent re-offending. The cost of training and skills development as a way to make offenders attractive to employers, to enable them to get jobs upon release and to permanently retain employment has been seen as a small price to pay compared to the social and economic costs of re-offending (BIS and MoJ, 2011).

In August 2012, the NCS assumed responsibility for providing career information advice and guidance in prisons from the Careers Information and Advice Service (CIAS) which operated solely in prisons, alongside the Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS). The NCS is tasked with providing a stronger focus on resettlement into employment through the prison gate as an important element of coherent support for offenders in custody. This support includes access, where available, to 'virtual campus' providing Curriculum Vitae (CV) building support and real time job search (BIS and MoJ, 2011).

The introduction of the NCS (which is available in almost 3,000 locations across England) into prisons, gives prisoners access to a service that is an integral part of the mainstream employment and skills system and enables them to benefit from a seamless service that they can access pre-sentence, in custody and post-release.

IAG plays a critical role in motivating the most disadvantaged groups such as offenders to engage in learning and move closer to the labour market. Indeed, research has demonstrated that offending can be reduced if issues such as drug use, housing and employment are tackled (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002), and the 2007 Citizens Advice

Bureau report 'Locked out' identified an ongoing need for improved access to advice for prisoners.

In the context of complex and turbulent offender needs, the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) devised seven pathways to reducing re-offending. They suggest that if these seven factors are addressed, from entry into prison through to release, they can help rehabilitate and ultimately reduce re-offending. The seven pathways are:

- Pathway 1: accommodation and support

- Pathway 2: education, training and employment

- Pathway 3: health

- Pathway 4: drugs and alcohol

- Pathway 5: finance, benefits and debt

- Pathway 6: children and families, and

- Pathway 7: attitudes, thinking and behaviour.

The seven pathways are an important element of the context of the study of adult career decision-making in custody. An additional two pathways were suggested by the Corston Report (2007) on women in prisons:

- Pathway 8: support for women who have been abused, raped or who have experienced domestic violence, and
- Pathway 9: support for women who have been involved in prostitution.

1.3 Research aims

This study is focused on improving the understanding of:

- how adults (defined as individuals aged over 18 years) make career decisions, and

- the awareness, use and satisfaction with the information support available to adults making career decisions (including, but not limited to, that provided by the NCS).

In essence, the research aims to ascertain the information needs of adults as they make decisions about learning, jobs and careers at different stages in their lives, and understand the factors that can impact upon those information needs. This research is not intended as an evaluation of the NCS.

1.4 Methodology

1.4.1 Overview of qualitative approach

As the literature suggests (see Chapter 2), career decision-making is a complex process with many inter-linked factors and influences. The depth of understanding required to try to understand how people make career decisions lends itself to qualitative research. Qualitative research provides a detailed understanding of how and why decisions are made and supported and it provides depth of insight. It does not provide evidence about the incidence of these decisions and is not statistically representative.

The research method was qualitative, with individuals recounting their 'career narrative'. By design therefore the methodology does not take into account the automatic or uncontrolled forms of mental processing outlined by the behavioural science literature that can affect career decisions, as individuals are unaware of these effects, and therefore unable to report them in answer to research questions.

The individual nature of career goals and of career decision-making processes lent itself to interviews on an individual basis and therefore the study is based on 65 individual semi-structured interviews (50 main stage and 15 with prisoners).

The research team, in consultation with BIS and the Skills Funding Agency, chose five areas in which to concentrate the research. This enabled the research to draw out any relevant labour market influences on people's work and learning choices and to cluster the face-to-face fieldwork. The five areas covered labour markets that were primarily service sector and others that had a greater concentration of manufacturing, as well as including rural and urban areas and a spread of coverage of the English regions. Consideration was also given to whether the geographic areas contained prisons in which to cite the prisoner element of the research.

The five areas selected were:

- County Durham in the North East, including Her Majesty's Prison (HMP) Kirklevington Grange

- Gloucestershire in the South West, including HMP Erlestoke

- Manchester in the North West, including HMP Styal, a female prison

- Southwark, Lambeth and Wandsworth in London, and

- Sussex in the South East, specifically Brighton, Hove and Eastbourne.

In selecting the prisons it was also felt to be important to include one female establishment, and to focus on establishments that were Category 'C' training prisons and open prisons. Local prisons were excluded from the research on the advice of the NOMS because prisoners in these settings are frequently dealing with immediate barriers such as housing or substance abuse issues and are less likely to engage constructively with career guidance, at least initially. Maximum security establishments were also excluded from the research.

A short-list of nine prisons in the five fieldwork areas was drawn up. The Governors of these establishments were all written to about the research by NOMS and asked if they would be willing to participate. Based on these responses and trying to ensure prisons from a range of geographies were included in the study, three prisons were selected: HMP Erlestoke, HMP Kirklevington Grange, and HMP Styal.

The main stage pilot took place on 8 and 9 January 2013 and the main stage fieldwork was conducted between 23 January and 22 March 2013. The prison pilot was conducted on 24 January 2013 and the main prison interviews took place between 14 February and 20 March 2013.

All of the prison interviews were conducted face-to-face. Forty-seven of the main stage interviews were conducted face-to-face, and seven took place by telephone in order to sample users of the web-based NCS resources. Interviewees interviewed by telephone were posted or emailed the research information sheet, consent form, and timeline prior to the telephone interview. In the analysis of the data, it did not seem that using a different interview mode had an impact on the depth or quality of the data. In some instances, it was a little harder to pin point the chronology of events when interviewing by telephone, but the substantive topics covered and content of the interview seemed in line with the experience of conducting the face-to-face interviews.

1.4.2 Pilot stage: main stage

Two experienced interviewers interviewed four interviewees for the main stage pilot. The four interviewees were diverse in terms of their age, gender, employment and learning statuses. The topic guide included a timeline, with the interviewees then selecting two career, work or learning decision-making points in time on which to focus.

Interviewees found it difficult to select specific points in their lives to explain how they made career, work and learning decisions, in part because the complexity of the choices they were faced with and the factors that were influencing them were often long-term and not typically neatly time-bound. For example, they needed to explain the sequence of events that had led them to be in a specific place at a specific point in time, so that they could then discuss how they approached making the decision.

When reflecting on the interviews, the researchers agreed that a broader career narrative approach, based solely on the timeline, would be most appropriate in helping interviewees to articulate key life and work events that influenced and affected their career decision-making. Interviewees were able to reflect critically on their career history and past decisions. The timeline approach seemed to help them to 'relive' past events and interviewees did not seem to rationalise their past decisions, or to paint themselves in a good light to the interviewer. Changes to the topic guide were made and the revised topic guide was then used in the prison pilot. A copy of the final topic guide is contained in the Annex.

1.4.3 The prison pilot

Three interviews were conducted for the prison pilot. The prison pilot was undertaken after the main stage pilot, so the revised tools (removing the need to focus on one or two decisions) were tested in this context. Two interviewees had a history of repeat offending

with drug-related offences and a third was serving a life sentence but with an extensive prison training and education history.

In terms of the interview process, the topic guide proved to be helpful and appropriate. The process of discussing the prisoner's learning and work history before and through their sentence(s) was appropriate and seemed logical and clear to each prisoner.

The pilot concluded that a range of ability levels should be included in the main prison interviews. On the basis of the pilot experience, it was deemed likely that prisoners who were planning their move through the gate would be the most helpful in terms of the objectives of the study. The prison materials were shown to be fit for purpose.

The topic guide used for the main interviews in prisons is contained in the Annex.

1.4.4   Sampling and recruitment

The research sampled users of the NCS (the telephone, face-to-face and web channels) as well as individuals who have made or who are making career decisions and who have not used the NCS. The research also includes a sample of prisoners. This section of the report first describes the sampling approach, before outlining the sample achieved part way through the fieldwork period.

In total, the research interviewed 65 interviewees: 15 prisoners and 50 other adults as part of the main stage fieldwork. The research is qualitative so will not be representative, but the sampling was designed to try to capture a range of experiences and individual characteristics to get a spread of 'stories' and circumstances. Specially the sampling for the main stage fieldwork aimed to capture a spread of people with the following characteristics:

- Prior levels of qualification: below Level 2, Level 2 or 3, and Level 4 and above including higher and professional qualifications

- Employment statuses: employed, and unemployed/inactive

- Learning statuses: people currently in learning and those that are not

- Ages: including young people aged 18-24, and people aged 40 and over, and

- NCS priority groups (eg: people with a learning difficulty and/or disability).

To capture the experiences of individuals using different NCS channels, as well as non-users, the following quotas were developed (Table 1.1).

Table 1.1: Overview of sample design

Sample source	Number of interviews
NCS telephone and face-to-face users	At least 20
NCS web-users	At least 10
Adults not using the NCS	At least 15
Prisoners	15 (including 5 with female prisoners)
TOTAL	65

Source: IES, 2013

National Careers Service telephone and face-to-face sample

A sample of approximately 250 individuals that had used the NCS face-to-face and telephone channel between August and November 2012 was drawn at random from all NCS telephone and face-to-face users in the five fieldwork areas. The sample was then checked to ensure that it included a balance of leads with the types of characteristics that the study sought to include and where necessary additional individuals were added to the sample (e.g. to increase the number of people who were employed).

An opt-out letter was posted to the sample explaining how they had been selected and the purpose of the research, giving them two weeks to notify the research team by telephone or by returning a form in a freepost envelope if they did not want to be contacted further about the research. In total, 17 opt-outs were received and three letters were returned undelivered as the respondents were no longer known at the addresses.

National Careers Service web sample

Between mid November and the end of December 2012 one in ten users of the NCS website received a pop-up asking if they would participate in research about careers. The pop-up was collecting a sample of NCS web service users for this, as well as other careers research. The pop-up said:

> *'The National Careers Service carries out research about careers guidance and related issues, including how people progress following use of this website. Research may be carried out by the National Careers Service, Government Departments or organisations working on their behalf. If you are interested in taking part, please type your full name, email and telephone number'.*

The details of 100 individuals who had provided their contact details were selected for this research. Where a home phone number had been given and it indicated that individuals were in the five fieldwork areas, these leads were prioritised. The remainder were selected at random from all individuals in the five fieldwork regions (e.g. South East). Region was also collected from individuals who opted in to the research.

Sample of adult career decision-makers not using the NCS

To create a sample of adults making work, learning and career decisions that had not used the NCS, we worked with intermediary organisations that would be used by or support these individuals. The NCS, particularly the face-to-face service, is targeted at priority groups, including people who are unemployed, so we also wished to increase the diversity of individuals in the sample overall by working with intermediaries to reach employed people. Across the five fieldwork areas, the team researched and selected relevant organisations and contacted them to introduce the research and to see if they could support it, for example by displaying posters and flyers, encouraging relevant clients to opt-in, or by posting details on their Twitter or Facebook accounts viewed by relevant clients. The intermediaries that supported the research included:

- Private careers counsellors and coaches

- Further Education Colleges

- Universities Careers Services

- Work-based learning providers

- Libraries

- Army careers services

- Unionlearn, and

- A Neighbourhood regeneration team.

In total, the research received 82 responses from individuals opting-in to take part.

Sample of prisoners

The research aimed to interview 15 prisoners from three establishments (i.e. five prisoners in each), in addition to piloting the research tools with three prisoners in one of the selected establishments. This number was felt to be sufficient to give some understanding about the issues that might be specific to prisoners.

The contact for the research within the prison was asked to seek voluntary participation in the research from a range of prisoners. We asked prisons to identify prisoners who were at a stage where they could think about actions after release in addition to reflecting on their early careers and learning and training in custody. These were to include prisoners who had used the NCS services available in prisons and some who had not, and prisoners at the middle and towards the end of their sentences. Following advice from NOMS, prisoners at the beginning of their sentence (as defined by the prison staff) were excluded from the research as they were unlikely to be thinking about release or engaging with careers and learning services at that point.

1.4.5   Achieved interviews

The following tables describe the demographic characteristics of the achieved sample for the main stage research.

Table 1.2: Achieved main stage interviews by area

	Total interviews
Brighton and Hove	10
Manchester	10
Gloucestershire	10
Southwark, Lambeth and Wandsworth	10
County Durham	10
TOTAL	50

Source: IES, 2013

Table 1.3: Achieved main stage interviews by sample type

	Total interviews
NCS sample (telephone and face-to-face)	25
NCS web sample	11
Opt-in sample	14
TOTAL	50

Source: IES, 2013

Table 1.4: Characteristics of main stage interviewees

	Total interviews
Learning status	
In learning	15
Not in learning	35
Employment status	
Employed/self-employed	19
Unemployed/inactive	31
Qualification level	
Below Level 2	9
Level 2 or 3	17
Level 4 and above	24
Age	
18-24	13
25-39	18
40 and over	19

Source: IES, 2013

Comparing the characteristics of our sample with those of the working age population using data from the Census 2011, in our sample young people aged 18-24 are slightly over-represented and people aged 40 or over are slightly under-represented. There are proportionately more people in our sample qualified to Level 4 and above, and fewer with qualifications below Level 2 when compared to the Census 2011 data. Our sample has proportionately more people who are unemployed or inactive and proportionately fewer people who are employed or self-employed. These differences between the sample and the working age population are to some extent likely to reflect how the sample was obtained and the priority groups of the NCS, but also to reflect the type of people making career decisions.

Within the main stage sample we also interviewed a number of people who were foreign nationals. In areas outside of London (40 interviews in total) there were five foreign

nationals, including from Israel, Iran and Latvia. In London there were a further five foreign nationals (half the sample in London). They included people from Somalia, Venezuela, Romania and Eire. The larger proportion of foreign nationals in the London sample reflects the ethnic diversity of the capital. In total there were 10 foreign nationals in the sample of 50 main stage interviewees. The 2011 census showed that 13 per cent of the resident population were born abroad (ONS, 2013), so non-UK nationals were slightly over-represented in our study.

The table below summarises some of the demographic characteristics of the prisoners in our sample. Several of the interviewees were currently studying and had gained qualifications at a higher level than when they started their sentence.

Table 1.5: Characteristics of prisoner sample

	Total interviews
Learning status	
In learning	12
Not in learning	3
Qualification level	
Below Level 2	3
Level 2 or 3	12
Level 4 and above	0
Age	
18-24	1
25-39	7
40 and over	7

Source: IES, 2013

About half of the prisoners we spoke to had histories of self-employment or running businesses. Prisoners are more likely than average to be self-employed, but the proportion interviewed in this research seems slightly above what might be expected. The data shows that 19 per cent of prisoners had been self-employed prior to conviction compared to a national average of 9.2 per cent of the population being self-employed (Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction, 2010; BIS, 2013).

1.4.6 Analysis approach

Based on the literature about career decision-making outlined above, as well as on content analysis of the interview data, the research team developed a model of the influences on career decision-making. These are the influences that respondents described as integral to their career decision-making processes – their understanding of the factors of influence not only informed the outcome of their decision, but the decision-making process itself. The factors influencing career decisions were then coded using the software package, Atlas.ti. Researchers held two workshops over the course of the fieldwork to discuss the content of the interviews, issues arising and how best to code the interview content. The Atlas analysis was supplemented with summary analysis of interviewees' career narratives. Throughout the report, where appropriate, we have highlighted differences in experiences by different groups of interviewees (e.g. by age).

1.5 Report structure

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- **Chapter 2** provides an overview of the career decision-making literature.

- Chapters 3, 4 and 5 provide evidence from the main stage research. **Chapter 3** presents the individual influences on career decision-making. **Chapter 4** presents external influences on career decision-making and sources of information and support. **Chapter 5** discusses how career decision-making is shaped by the factors and presents five career decision-making styles.

- **Chapter 6** presents the findings of the research with prisoners.

- **Chapter 7** outlines the conclusions and sets out the implications of the research for career support.

2 Career decision-making: literature overview

Career Information, Advice and Guidance tries to facilitate transitions in and out of work and learning by providing insight into relevant work and learning opportunities. Career decisions are not a straightforward process and a multitude of factors may influence an individual's choices about their working life. This literature review informs the qualitative study and its analysis model.

This chapter explores the decision-making process and offers a brief overview of some of the main theories around career decision-making as well as a number of segmentations to help categorise how individuals perceive themselves within their career or what 'type' of jobseeker they are. Lastly, we present a short overview of the literature relating to career development and career decisions throughout the lifecycle.

Key findings

The decision-making process in itself is a complex construct and one that individuals do not undertake using 'rational' behaviour. Behavioural science describes this by separating information processing done by System 1 (which is automatic) and that done by System 2 (which is cognitive). We are not aware of what the automatic part of our brain is doing and when we make decisions, much of the information processing has been done by System 1 before System 2 starts. Therefore we can rule out pieces of information and options before we start to consciously think about making a decision.

Family and friends and wider networks have a significant influence on individuals and their career decision-making (the influence of social norms). Behavioural science suggests that individuals will tend to overweight information that seems particularly salient to them because it comes from people they know and that we then generalise from a very small number of personal examples (availability bias). Alongside this people tend to underweight evidence from more objective sources, like careers advisers.

The theory of planned happenstance explores the influence of chance events in career decision-making. In the event of uncertainty, the theory advocates the exploration of different professions and environments with the potential opening of unexpected career and job opportunities. This model may be useful in helping people to acknowledge the uncertainties, chaos and complexities of today's lives and use 'chance' as a positive platform to explore new avenues and opportunities.

Schien's career anchors are values and motives that are important to people in their career decision-making and include security/stability, lifestyle and entrepreneurial creativity. Individuals may or may not be aware of the 'career anchors' that are important to them (Schien, 2007).

Building on the evidence, there have been various segmentations of adults and their career decision-making. One, by Ipsos-Mori (2009), developed six 'customer personas' for the NCS relating to how near or far an individual is from their potential and the extent to which they have a clear goal. Bimrose et. al (2007) identified four types of career decision-maker: evaluative careerists; strategic careerists; aspirational careerists; and opportunistic careerists.

There is a growing body of work about digital literacy as it relates to career decision-making. With the expansion of the digitalisation of careers services, digital literacy is a vital career management skill. Individuals need to have the skills to be able to find relevant information, but also to interpret the information and apply it to their situation, and the literature suggests a role for careers professionals in assisting people with this.

2.1 Career decision-making theories and segmentation

The decision-making process in itself is a complex construct. While it was initially assumed that decisions were the outcomes of completely rational choices, Simon (1955) determined that a human's capacity for rationality is limited or bounded due to lack of complete information and processing capacity. Instead, people will settle for an adequate selection rather than the optimal (satisficing). This issue is important for this report because while behavioural biases arise from the mental shortcuts that people use to reduce the burden of complex decision-making, they also result in individuals commonly making systematic 'errors' in their decision (see for example Dolan et al., 2010). In relation to career decision-making, this could mean that individuals make decisions that are not in their own best interests. Research has further explored how choices are processed and decisions made. Based on extensive experiments, researchers have developed theories about rational-intuitive decision-making and a number of these two system models exist (see eg Epstein, 1994, and Kahneman, 2003). Kahneman (2003) describes System 1 (automatic) and System 2 (cognitive) processing. We are not aware of what the automatic part of our brain is doing and much of the information processing has been done by System 1 before System 2 starts. Therefore we can rule out pieces of information and options before we start to consciously think about making a decision. This forms part of the evidence supporting the MINDSPACE framework that summarises behaviour effects and is widely used by policymakers to interpret data through the lens of behavioural sciences (Dolan et al., 2010). We compare our findings against this framework in section 5.4.2.

Some studies have shown that the career decision-making process is not straightforward and rational, but rather a combination of intuitive and rational decision-making. Experiments have indicated that the rational mind was actually constructing reasons why an initial decision of the intuitive mind was attractive in order to justify that particular choice (Blustein and Strohmer, 1987, Gazzaniga, 1985). A multitude of models taking this dichotomy as well as ideas from bounded rationality into consideration have been developed, including positive uncertainty (Gelatt, 1989) or depth oriented values extraction (Colozzi, 2003).

A particular place is occupied by theories that take the occurrence and impact of chance events into consideration such as the planned happenstance theory (Mitchell et al., 1999). This model may be useful in helping people to acknowledge the uncertainties, chaos and

complexities of today's lives and use 'chance' as a positive platform to explore new avenues and opportunities. It advocates the exploration of different professions and environments with the potential opening of unexpected career and job opportunities, rather than relying on being able to find the perfect career and follow a fixed path. The difficulty may lie in the extent to which individuals are able to recognise and capitalise on such happenstance occasions and be open and prepared to take decisions under uncertainty.

Most of the models above place the individual at the core of the career decision-making process. Hodkinson (2008: 9) criticises that emphasis on the individual and instead emphasises the importance of social and power relations:

> *'Career is always part of unequal and complex relational interactions. Career decision-making is never an exclusively individual act. Within any career field, actions of others, be they employers, managers, admissions tutors, government agents, Trades Unions, colleagues, family and friends have a significant influence. The ability of any individual to progress is strongly influenced by the resources (economic, cultural and social) at their disposal. Any career theory that does not take account of these complex and unequal power relations is inadequate. Any theory, which assumes that only the individual him/herself makes a career decision, is also inadequate.'*

In Hodkinson's view, early models of career decision-making such as person-environment fit originally developed by Parsons (1909) would have been unsuitable as a career theory due to their lack of focus on external pressures. Their main proposition was that people and their different skills, attitudes and interests could be matched to jobs via the application of a whole battery of questionnaires and inventories. The role of the careers adviser was to administer the test and then make a recommendation of which careers were suitable. Later iterations of this type of theory developed more complex typologies of traits and occupational profiles (e.g. Holland, 1996). However, while generally individuals made occupational choices that were aligned to their interests, the relationship between these job choices and job satisfaction has been shown to be weak (Tinsley, 2000). Arnold (2004) attributes this mismatch to the changing world of work where the types of jobs and work environments, for which he writes that job titles are inadequate descriptors, become more important factors in people's careers choices.

In contrast to the more passive role the individual has in person-environment models, models building on development psychology give the individual a more active role and see assessment tools more as tools for self-discovery rather than decision-making tools. Super's (1980) model of career development proceeds through stages closely aligned to the life cycle, where in earlier stages the focus in on qualifications and skills which then later on progress to include other responsibilities (e.g. family care). One of the main drawbacks of this kind of approach is that it emphasises values closely associated with an individual's innate motivations and fails to acknowledge people's different perceptions of the importance of work for them (Kidd, 1981).

A different strand of theories focuses on the social environment and structural influences on career decision-making. Law's (1981) mid-range theory examined the impact of formal and informal advisers (e.g. career professionals, family and friends). Although not directly related, there is a close association of the mid-range theory with Social Cognitive Career

Theory (SCCT) (Lent et al., 1994), which focuses on self-efficacy (the extent to which people believe they can successfully complete a task) (Bandura, 1977), which research has shown is influenced by attributes such as class, gender and ethnicity.

Foskett and Johnston (2010) applied network analysis in a study that examined the career decisions of individuals who had the potential to go to higher education but decided not to. They found that family and friends as well as significant other individuals had a major impact on study participants (the influence of social norms and availability bias). Equally, careers guidance had failed to inspire them to *'overcome the conservatism inherent in their networks'* (Foskett and Johnston, 2010: 235) and they could therefore not imagine a life lived differently from their networks. Behavioural science suggests that individuals will tend to overweight information that seems particularly salient to them because it comes from people they know and that we then generalise from a very small number of personal examples (availability bias) (see for example Dolan et al, 2010). Alongside this, people tend to underweight evidence from more objective sources, like the careers service in the Foskett and Johnston study (2010). Foskett and Johnston attribute the findings of their network analysis to careers guidance coming too late in the person's life and because insufficient linkages between employment and education are made. This point is particularly important because Purcell et al. (2008) found that career plans and future employability were core reasons why individuals chose a course and this was particularly true for people from disadvantaged and underrepresented backgrounds.

The influence of parental attachment, parenting styles and career decision self-efficacy has been of interest to researchers as a means to explain different career decision-making outcomes between men and women (Lease and Dahlbeck, 2009). Research has shown that stable parental attachments facilitate career decision-making, personal freedom and greater levels of career-related exploration (Eigen et al., 1987; Ketterson and Blustein, 1997) thus leading to more stable career decisions.

In a similar vein, Greenbank (2011) examined the sources of information undergraduate students access when making career decisions and found that informal networks including family, friends, and other sources of informal advice were preferred as sources of advice over formal sources such as careers advisers, despite the higher quality of advice they could deliver. Greenbank (2011: 41) associates this with a general reluctance of the participants '*to deal with the unfamiliar and be proactive*'. This may also impact on individuals' readiness to engage in careers exploration and their readiness for unexpected life events. Greenbank and Hepworth (2008) also found that particularly working class students were at a disadvantage to their middle class peers in terms of careers decision-making because they distrusted or felt intimidated by professional careers advisers, and often had no awareness that careers support was offered that went beyond the initial careers choice process. Because they held term-time jobs, many had not thought about graduate careers and felt no need to engage in further careers exploration. This also partially contributed to limited attempts to improve their employability through internships because many focused on getting a good degree rather than expanding their social networks and soft skills.

In contrast to the socio-economic differences outlined above, refugees are a group with particular needs due to the displacement from their home countries and disruption caused to their lives during the asylum process in the UK (Hawthorn and Jackson, 2004). While

many were highly qualified in their countries of origin, a mismatch with the UK qualification system, over- or undervaluation of transferrable skills, language difficulties as well as social and psychological trauma are just some factors influencing a refugee's ability to engage with the careers decision-making process as well as the wider labour market in the UK.

These varying influences outline how the careers decision-making theories are sometimes at odds with the way policy tends to fall back on what Hodkinson (2008) calls 'folk theory': an apparently common-sense theoretical conception about career and career decisions which may include many assumptions such as that careers are linear and rational, that people can be matched with careers, and that careers will progress once a 'good' decision has been made at the start. An earlier evaluation by Hodkinson et al. (1996) showed that young people did not necessarily make rational decisions about their career and that progression in a chosen career was also not linear, but influenced by external influences beyond the person's control (eg life events, family, changes in circumstances). There were clear indications that young people made decisions influenced by social and occupational structures, consistent with gender and class.

The issue of class is interesting as well. Packard and Babineau (2009) found in a study of first generation college students from working-class backgrounds that individuals entered into career compromises constrained by financial, time and family commitments, often combined with a lack of the necessary skills to succeed in higher education. These compromises, in some cases, were motivated by family members discouraging advancement based on their own experiences and a perception that advancement at a higher level career was out of their reach. As mentioned earlier, planned happenstance theory advocates the exploration of different career paths, however, class or limited financial means can impose limited opportunities to engage in such explorations and thus constrains the occupational horizons that people might consider for their careers (Lent and Brown, 1996, Packard and Nguyen, 2003). Life events such as a desire for higher pay, reaching a plateau in their job or having inspiring role models sometimes caused individuals to renegotiate their compromises and seek advancement (Packard and Babineau, 2009).

Kidd (2006: 29) notes that:

> 'People do attempt to 'choose' and do use interests, motivations and self-concepts in this process, as Super and Holland argue, but they do this against a background of structural constraints over which they have little control.'

Today, the world of work is changing rapidly and with more and more responsibility shifted to the individual and away from the employer, research is moving towards a more social constructivist perspective around careers guidance, one which focuses more on identity formation and career self-management (see e.g. Sultana, 2010).

Basic models of career self-management often take a cyclical shape (see for instance Johns Hopkins University, 2013). Models like this offer a linear, evaluative approach to career choices and decisions, but generally they do not take the changing contexts into account. As such they fail as useful theories by Hodkinson's standards.

The trilateral model of adaptive career decision-making (Krieshok et al., 2009) is possibly one of the more contemporaneous models taking into account this rapidly changing world of work, where life-long careers have become unlikely and frequent adaptations to the changing labour market conditions are required. It takes into account the rational and intuitive decision-making processes, but enhances it with occupational engagement (experiential learning and information), although it still focuses mainly on individual characteristics and less on external influences. Krieshok et al. (2009) develop a clear vision of the adaptive career decision maker.

'The adaptive career decision-maker:

(a) is persistently engaged, accepting that career decision-making is an enduring process and that vocational security is illusory,

(b) does not rely exclusively on innate talents, but rather seeks to compensate for deficits to become a competent generalist,

(c) is wary of specialization and how it can narrow vocational options,

(d) is a life-long learner and integrates new knowledge with what he or she already knows,

(e) cultivates a sense of foresight in respect to trends in the field as a result of persistent occupational engagement, learning, and the integration of new knowledge,

(f) is never completely foreclosed,

(g) is flexible and willing to act despite fears,

(h) regularly questions his or her perceptions of the vocational reality with which he or she is faced,

(i) is aware of the limits of reason and intuition and seeks to manage biases and heuristics, and

(j) has an existential/zen outlook that affords numerous advantages, including an essential trust in the universe that allows him or her to see beyond appearances and transform seemingly threatening problems into opportunities.'

Krieshok et al., 2009: 285

The concept of career adaptability has since spread widely, but Hirschi notes that there is no consensus about just what the concept encompasses, '*whether it should be conceived as a competence, resource, disposition or personal readiness*' (Hirschi, 2012: 369). In the context of employers shifting the accountability for career management to employees, self-directed career management, which includes not only career adaptability, but also self-management and flexibility, is gaining more and more importance if individuals are to successfully manage their career transitions (Kossek et al., 1998, Sullivan et al., 1998).

In order to address the issue of a lack of consistency defining career adaptability, Hirschi (2012) developed **the career resources model**, which subsumes the various notions of self-directed career management into one coherent framework (see Figure 2.1). He

highlights the model's usefulness as a framework to guide discussions with individuals about which factors are important to master career development in the ever changing world of work and thus aid the decision-making process.

Figure 2.1: Hirschi's (2012) career resources model

Example components: Self-concept clarity, goal clarity, goal congruence
Related constructs: 'Knowing why', career identity, career insight, career self-management attitudes, attitudes of career adaptability, protean career orientation, identity components of employability

Identity resources

Human capital resources

Example components: Education, transferable skills, occupational knowledge, cognitive ability
Related constructs: 'Knowing how', employability

Career management skills

Example components: Optimism, hope, self-efficacy, resilience
Related constructs: 'Knowing why', career resilience, personal characteristics of career adaptability, psychological mobility, psychological components of employability

Psychological resources

Social resources

Example components: Mentors, developmental networks, parents, social support
Related constructs: 'Knowing whom', social components of employability

Source: Hirschi, 2012

While Hirschi's framework provides a good basis to explore the decision-making process as well as careers advice methodologies in more depth, it also needs to be noted that particularly from a practitioner point of view, Hirschi's model may be too broad and in some areas (e.g. human capital resources) might require further refinement.

The Canadian **Blueprint for Life/Work Designs** framework may be more practitioner-orientated and is used in modified versions in the USA and Australia. Various other countries (including Lithuania and the UK) as well as the European Union have looked into adopting the model to their own contexts (see LSIS, 2013b). In the UK, the Learning and Skills Improvement Service has promoted the framework, and it is in quite wide use (see for example, LSIS, 2013a). The Blueprint consists of a complex matrix of 11 competencies judged necessary to manage and design ones work and life successfully from childhood through to adulthood. The competencies are grouped in three core areas: Personal Management, Learning and Work Exploration and Life/ Work Building. Each area then has four different skill levels (which broadly correspond to different life stages). While individuals can use it, it is designed mainly for practitioners, policy makers and programme designers as a framework to develop a systematic, structured approach to creating career development conscious citizens (National Life/Work Centre, 2006). As such it has built-in methodologies to support practitioners, policy makers and resource developers by, for

example, offering specific resources to apply the framework in client work or the building of communities of practice to support practitioners and disseminate the idea to a wider audience. While Hooley et al. (2012b) recognise the Blueprint framework as an innovative and influential approach that combines core and contextual elements of careers development and support, they also caution that its effectiveness has not been empirically tested yet and therefore '*it should not be regarded by either practitioners or governments as a fully tested approach to developing citizens' career management skills*' (Hooley et al., 2012b: 2). However, they also see the innovation and strong advantage of the Blueprint model in its emphasis on learning and personal development that can be accessed by individuals and applied and taken into consideration by policy makers, practitioners and resource developers alike. It is unique in that it unites a *'flexible conceptual framework through its three core elements (learning areas, learning model and levels) and articulates these through the four contextual elements (resources, service delivery approach, community of practice and policy connection'* (Hooley et al., 2012b: 13).

There are various customer segmentation models categorising adults making career decisions. Notably, Ipsos MORI (2009) undertook an unpublished study for BIS where, based on extensive qualitative interviews, a six category customer segmentation model was developed based on where people were in their lives and careers, their information and support needs as well as their attitudes to engaging with lifelong learning. The study produced six distinct customer segments displaying a variety of socio-economic, skills and demographic characteristics. The figure below gives a brief overview of the segments relative to their distance to their goals and the direction of their planning. This model is essentially one describing the current career situation of an individual rather than their decision-making style.

Based on this segmentation the NCS has developed 'personas' that correspond to the segmentation model which are supposed to help visualise the issues of the various target groups (Hamilton, 2011).

Figure 2.2: Customer segmentation in relation to the direction and distance to an individual goal

Direction:
Clear goal and strong intention to enter progressive employment

Direction would be determined by the clarity of the goal that an individual has, their commitment to pursuing it

Transitional
Undergoing career change

Fixated
Inflexible idea of goal which is inappropriate, not acknowledging lack of relevant skills

On-track:
Skills and goals aligned and appropriate

Distance:
Far from goal / potential

'Would if I could'
Have aspiration, lack clear path, motivation blocked by perceived practical obstacles

Distance:
Close to goal / potential

Distance would be affected by skills, practical barriers, self-confidence

Dispirited
Do not see personal relevance of skills development

Trapped
Low confidence, low aspiration

Direction:
Unclear goal and weak intention to enter progressive employment

Source: Ipsos MORI, 2009, unpublished

A longitudinal study of 30 people who had used careers guidance was undertaken by Bimrose et al. (2007). They found four types of career decision-making. The first group was **evaluative careerists**. This group used self-appraisal and self-reflection through the identification and evaluation of their needs, values and abilities. The second group the study identified was **strategic careerists**. This group tended to engage with cognitive processing of facts and feelings – analysis and synthesis – on a continuous basis and use rational appraisal of information as the basis for action. They tended to marginalise emotions and their 'emotional self' in their decision- making. The third group, **aspirational careerists**, tended to have vaguely focused, but distant goals, and to have a career journey that typically involved (often considerable) material sacrifice. Their individual circumstances and priorities tended to impinge on the overall process – with the heart typically ruling the head. The final group, **opportunistic careerists**, tended to have the ability (often preference) to cope with high levels of uncertainty and were reluctant to close off options. They had the predisposition to take advantage of opportunities that present themselves unexpectedly, and had a flexible approach.

A recent UKCES study (INON, 2011) developed a segmentation model which was derived from qualitative interviews and behavioural experiments. The study developed eight cognitive profiles of jobseekers, which are outlined in the table below. These profiles are in some cases career situations (e.g. embedded) but mostly career drivers.

Table 2.1: Cognitive profiles

Profile	Description
Seeker of meaning	People for whom meaning or purpose in their work is all-important
What am I good at	Those who focus on their existing strengths
What's expected of me	People influenced by social expectations: from family, peers or culture
Means to an end	People who work to enable them to do other things that are more important to them
Serendipity	Those who don't have any particular aims, ending up in a career mainly due to chance
I have a dream	Those who are and have always been passionate about a specific role
Disconnected	People who are disaffected and not involved in the world of work
Embedded	People who are entrenched in a career due to inertia or the difficulty of changing

Source: INON (2011)

The career drivers in the UKCES study are rather like the career anchors of Schein (2007), used to help individuals understand their decision-making and career choices. Career anchors are used widely in employing organisations and by independent career coaches, but less so by public careers services. They are the self-concept of an individuals' 'internal career' (the subjective sense where someone is going with their career) as opposed to their 'external career' (formal stages and roles of careers as defined by organisations and society). These self-concepts are based on

'1) self-perceived talents and abilities

2) basic values, and most important,

3) the evolved sense of motives and needs as they pertain to the career.'

Schein, 2007: 27

These anchors are thought of as a stabilising force. They are the values and motives individuals will not give up on when having to choose, despite sometimes being unaware of their anchors. Table 2.2 below briefly describes the anchors.

Table 2.2: Schein's (2007) career anchors

Anchor	Description
Autonomy/ independence	These people have a primary need to work under their own rules and steam. They avoid standards and prefer to work alone.
Security/stability	Security-focused people seek stability and continuity as a primary factor of their lives. They avoid risks and are generally 'lifers' in their job.
Technical-functional competence	This kind of person likes being good at something and will work to become a guru or expert. They like to be challenged and then use their skill to meet the challenge, doing the job better than almost anyone else.
General managerial competence	These people want to be managers (and not just to get more money, although this may be used as a metric of success). They like problem-solving and dealing with other people. They thrive on responsibility.
Entrepreneurial creativity	These people like to invent things, be creative and, most of all, to run their own businesses. They differ from those who seek autonomy in that they will share the workload. They find ownership very important. They easily get bored.
Service or dedication to a cause	Service-oriented people are driven by how they can help other people more than using their talents (which may fall in other areas).
Pure challenge	People driven by challenge seek constant stimulation and difficult problems that they can tackle. Such people will change jobs when the current one gets boring and their career can be very varied.
Life style	Those who are focused first on lifestyle look at their whole pattern of living. They not so much balance work and life as integrate it. They may even take long periods off work in which to indulge in their other interests.

2.2 Digital literacy in career decision-making

With the ever increasing importance of the digital economy and the expansion of the digitisation of services, digital literacy is fast becoming a vital career management skill which needs to be identified and developed (Hooley et al., 2010). However, digital literacy is not just an issue for individuals, it is also a concern for careers and guidance professionals, who need to adapt their skills sets to suit and capitalise on the possibilities of online provision as well as receive appropriate support (Bimrose et al., 2010).

The study by INON (2011) also examined people's use of information technology and online media in their job searches. It highlighted the importance of easy to navigate websites and the clear presentation and referencing of information. The study also highlighted an issue that is quite important when considering how to deliver an information-based service online: the trustworthiness of information. Some individuals had a natural distrust in the validity of the information available online. These people often sought to validate the information obtained via other sources. Other individuals just felt uncomfortable acting within an impersonal environment and preferred human support and feedback in their search process.

This issue is reiterated in an expert paper by Bimrose and Barnes (2010) who distinguish between digital natives (young people who have grown up using computers, smartphones,

etc.) and digital immigrants (adults who had to adapt to using information technology later in life). They highlight the essential need to tailor services in a way, so that they are still accessible and useful to both natives and immigrants. Furthermore, they highlight the issue of the digital divide as a danger to further excluding disadvantaged individuals with no access to digital technologies, but who are identified as those most in need of careers Information, Advice and Guidance.

Nevertheless the opportunities to re-invent careers guidance with the use of digital technologies are endless. And with those opportunities, comes also a change in the role of the careers adviser. A shift towards the role of 'sense maker' for personalised targeted labour market information is predicted, which requires the skills to access, mediate and interpret as well as tailor specific information to individuals within their local context (Bimrose and Barnes, 2010).

The availability of standardised information and easy access to it is a recurring issue that is continuously developed. On the basis of increased transparency of public data, a gateway has been created (data.gov.uk) which provides a single point of access to all public data (including Labour Market Information) and has been a catalyst for development of new applications to visualise, extract and manipulate this data (GHK, 2010). There is a demand for the provision of localised, user-friendly and easily accessible data (Bysshe, 2011). Embedding this LMI data into online careers Information, Advice and Guidance services at a high quality is a challenge, particularly given the variety of new forms of engagement, and the need for advisers to signpost and navigate the complex data in conjunction with the necessary upskilling of advisers to fulfil this task (GHK, 2010). Despite the increasing 'empowerment' of the service user and information seeker, the role of the careers adviser is unlikely to become obsolete, however, the skills profile and training needs may change substantially (CFE, 2012). There is also a strong need for organisational strategies to mine and visualise this data which goes beyond the careers guidance community, but includes employer organisations as well as Sector Skills Councils to provide the most suitable and up-to-date data for advisers.

2.3 Career decision-making and age

Sultana (2010) criticises most career guidance services in Europe for being very front-loaded (early on in life) and offered in formally professionalised ways that are not readily recognised as useful by users. For example, university students preferred advice from informal contacts rather than formal ones (Greenbank, 2011). Work based career guidance is considered much more appropriate as it would centre around work and past career choices (Sultana, 2010). A case in point are Wethington et al. (2004) who examined 'turning points' and significant changes in people's lives. They found that particularly around the age of 30, many people experienced a work-related turning point, suggesting an increased need for career guidance around that age point to help adults reconsider their earlier career choices.

This also chimes with research on staff career development as a means to promote business development (Hutchison et al., 2012). Case studies showed that providing cooperation with learning providers, clear progression pathways, career and skills

guidance, community engagement and transition support for employees at risk of redundancy not only motivated employees, helped them to keep their skills up-to-date and provided opportunities for further exploration, but created a dedicated and engaged staff, creating intangible business benefits for the employers. These support, training and guidance offers were ongoing throughout people's careers which links well with Sultana's idea of work-place guidance.

However, it is important to take into consideration the diverse range and characteristics of employers in terms of size, sectors, strategies and philosophies. To a large extent these factors determine their ability and willingness to engage in workforce development. Hooley et al. (2012a) highlight the need of careers guidance professionals to act as mediators between businesses, workers and particularly job seekers, to create 'action spaces' where the parties can engage in workforce planning and development (with the help of careers guidance) to create a win-win situation.

Another key transition point during the life course that needs careful management is the return to work and development of older workers. With the changing socio-economic profile (more people retired than working) and the rise in the state pension age, the management of older workers as well as the extension of their working life beyond the state retirement age is becoming a more and more pressing issue (Hedges and Sykes, 2009). Weyman et al. (2012), outline that many older workers would consider staying in employment past their retirement age, but they lack the information about viable options, financial implications and planning the transition and are unlikely to proactively seek out this information. Older workers are more likely to respond to events, discussions about options and presentation of opportunities when this is instigated by a third party. There could be real potential for careers guidance to make a positive impact on both employers and employees, helping to retain valued skills and knowledge as well as facilitating the extended transition into retirement.

It is important to note, however, that many theories around career and life course development were derived from male study populations and only a small amount of work has been done around career and life course development of women (Kidd, 2006). Generally, it appears that while male career development can be related to age brackets, women's career development may be more closely related to family life cycles and external influences such as cultural and social stereotypes. Nevertheless, theories that centre around learning stages (e.g. Hall and Chandler, 2005) are much more suitable to encompass both genders as they focus on development of strengths at times when they naturally occur, rather than through a predetermined lens. These theories are about providing unbiased support to provide individuals with an understanding of where to invest their time and effort to achieve the goals they aspire to (Nicholson and de Waal-Andrews, 2005).

Kidd (2006) argues that individuals need a range of career skills and attitudes to cope with the quickly changing labour markets in ever more uncertain and often precarious employment relationships. These skills include emotional capacity to deal with uncertainty and frequent change as well as more tangible skills such as an ability to continuously self-assess skills sets, expectations, exploration of opportunities and negotiation with their social networks.

2.4 **Conclusions**

The literature illustrates some of the limitations of deploying a qualitative research methodology for exploring career decision-making as well as highlighting some issues to consider in the data analysis. In relation to the qualitative methodology, we acknowledge that some of the career decision-making process will not be conscious, and individuals are likely to have ruled out choices and limited their options before they consciously start to 'think' about their career choices. Individuals will not be able to recall or recount these unconscious decisions during a qualitative interview.

The research and analysis aims to identify how individuals interact with others, and look for examples of influences, either acknowledged by the respondent or implicit in their narrative. The research is aware that individuals try to reduce the burden of career decision-making by using mental short-cuts and giving (undue) weight to information that seems particularly relevant to them. Respondents are likely to generalise from a small number of personal examples and in doing so we gather evidence about the number of career options they consider and the extent to which they rely on the experience and career choices of friends and family when choosing an occupation.

Increasingly information about work and learning is delivered online. The research therefore explores the extent to which adults making career decisions use the internet as a source of information, but also importantly whether they have the skills they need to find and interpret online information effectively.

Chance and unplanned events are at the centre of the theory of planned happenstance. The analysis considers the extent to which individuals can plan as part of their career decision-making and examine the influence of chance events, including whether they can be used as a positive platform to explore new avenues and opportunities. The theory suggests that some individuals may 'cultivate chance' by trying, testing and exploring new avenues and being open to opportunities.

3 Internal factors affecting career decision-making

In this chapter we draw out the influences on career decision-making relating to the characteristics, circumstances, opportunities and constraints that are part of the individual: the internal factors. This does not describe the decision-making process itself (this is covered in Chapter 5), but rather the factors that influence the decision, and the type of decision-making style an individual uses. Each of the internal factors is discussed in turn. First we explore individuals' career, work and learning identity and values, then their personal circumstances, opportunities and constraints, before discussing how an individual's psychological orientation can affect their career decision-making. Finally we look at the influence of an individual's education, qualifications and skills. A diagram at the start of each section illustrates the dimensions that are included within each of the influences. It also illustrates how the factor interacts with career decision-making. Where factors tend to be determined by the individual and have a two-way relationship with career decision-making, their relationship is denoted by a double-headed arrow. Where factors tend to be factual opportunities and constraints relating to an individual's circumstances these are illustrated relating to career decision-making by a zigzag, denoting a relationship, but with less direct control.

The external factors affecting career decision-making are outlined in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 discusses how people make career decisions.

Key findings

Some had clear ideas of their career or aspiration, and others did not. This was not necessarily related to age: some young people had clear career goals and others did not, and indeed some adults in their mid-career were still not sure of their career goal. It was common for people who did not have a clear career goal to articulate what they did not want from work rather than positively identify possible occupations. We identified four groupings relating to how people saw their career goals and plans to implement them. One group had a clear plan with progression; another had aspirations but was not sure how to achieve them; another group had no clear aspirations, but a desire to progress and were creating foundations to move forward; and one group had no clear aspirations.

Interviewees' career values and what they wanted from work changed throughout their life. Common career values were security and stability, service or dedication to a cause, lifestyle, enjoyment and work interest, and gaining recognition and respect. Lifestyle career choices were more prevalent among younger people, but through mid-life, security and stability tended to become more important.

Respondents made their career decisions within the context of their family. In particular their partners framed the context within which interviewees made decisions. Some interviewees moved area or even country for their partner's career, and the financial

---

situation of interviewees was intertwined with those of their partners. When considering the financial affordability of work and learning choices these were taken in the context of the household budget. For those with children, how best to balance paid work and childcare responsibilities was typically a joint decision.

A few interviewees had health problems and these had had various impacts on their careers. Mental and physical illness could lead to job loss, prolonged periods of unemployment and constrained career choices. Related to health was an individual's psychological orientation. How all interviewees felt about themselves and their life more generally influenced their career decision-making, and particularly affected their belief that they could affect career change. A lack of confidence could lead to a downward spiral, whereby interviewees closed down work or learning opportunities they were offered. Other interviewees were more open to change and felt more ready to take career decisions when they presented.

Success, or otherwise in education, and the experience of learning could negatively, or positively affect an individual's self-confidence. Many individuals held a portfolio of qualifications gained throughout their lives, reflecting varied work and learning experiences. Interviewees tended to value qualifications and felt that these were important signals about what they could offer in the labour market.

3.1 Career, work and learning – identity and values

In this section we will draw out the findings that relate to what respondents want from work, their perceptions of the type of work they are suited to, and whether or not they have a clear career goal. We will also report on the extent to which respondents make/take time to reflect on their careers and the level of awareness and self-insight they demonstrated. Essentially we look to answer the question 'how do I see my future career?' (Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1: Career, work and learning identity and goals
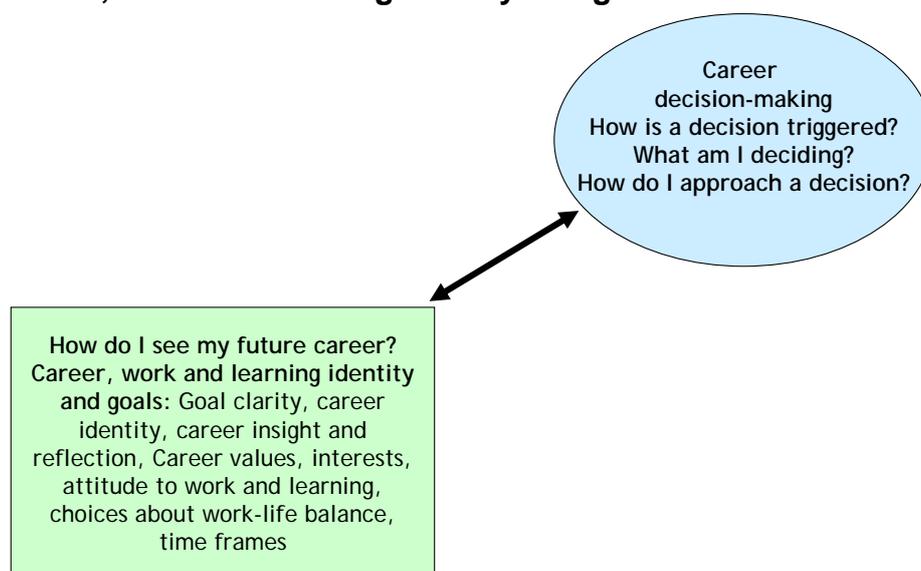
Source: IES, 2013

3.1.1   Career identity

This section explores participants' views of their role or occupation and how they define the work they are suited to. This can be summarised conceptually as career identity. The concept of career identity refers to how central one's career is to an individual's identity; it consists of two sub-domains: work involvement and desire for upward mobility (Hirschi, 2012).

How interviewees viewed their career identity could be placed along a continuum where at one end, participants had a very clearly defined view of themselves in relation to their work and how their work related to them, and how they would develop it. At the other end of the spectrum were interviewees who had no clear idea what their career was or what their aspiration was, however, they often expressed their view of themselves in relation to their career as what it was that they did **not** want. This could include views on undertaking specific tasks, as well as the value and meaning they wanted from work (see section 3.1.3).

These career identities were often formed over long periods of time. There were recurring influencing factors that impacted on individuals' decisions that could be located internally (perceptions of skills, personal preferences, motivations) and externally. External influences on career identity included for instance teachers making recommendations (or discouraging from a particular choice), family traditions, geographical location, the financial situation or dramatic changes in circumstances. Quite frequently a combination of these factors applied as well (see section 4.3 for a full discussion on the influence of social factors and sources of support on career decision-making).

A few participants explained that while they had different career goals and aspirations, external circumstances forced them into other kinds of jobs that would pay their bills. These jobs were often seen as stopgaps to enable them to work towards a desired career or they were seen as a fall back option if the desired career did not work out. Many respondents where this particularly applied were in creative industries (music, painting, audio/video design) or were looking to move into careers where there was high competition and creativity played a vital role (eg architecture). While these respondents often spoke of how they made do (often with some frustration due to lack of control over the trajectory their creative career would take), they were quite realistic in their plans and concrete in their plans on what they had to do to establish themselves in the field. For example:

> *'After the six months of the newsagent thing, I started doing cleaning jobs but because I knew why I was doing it, I was supporting the music again, having to do stuff that you basically don't have to be educated for and I have a degree that I haven't used. It pissed me off a bit but at the same time I needed it at that time to be part-time, I needed it to be a bit flexible, so I was fitting stuff around music, which I'm still doing.'* (25-39, Level 4 or above, employed[1])

---

[1]   Quotations are attributed with: age range, qualification status, employment status, with additional characteristics included only where necessary.

'I did an architecture degree part-time from 2002-2005 and continued working in architects offices, working my way up to get a little bit more responsibilities. And in a way that's what I, that's still what I intend to do. But I've had to go back into teaching because of the recession.' (40+, Level 4 or above, employed)

In some cases, an individual's view of their career identity was based on reflection on their personal preferences. Many knew what they enjoyed doing and where their talents lay from early childhood.

'Maybe, because I've always been an English-orientated person, library was like, oh, dream job. I used to have my own way of coding my books when I was a kid; I was really sad, which I told them about in the interview, and got the job.' (25-39, Level 4 or above, employed)

Others had developed clear preferences of what they enjoyed doing through a series of work experiences, often spanning many different professions. These could loosely be classed as careers exploration and frequently these individuals defined their careers by what they did not want. These definitions were often based on extensive reflection over different aspects of their working life. For example:

'I didn't really apply myself to my studies, but I think I actually have a real passion for teaching. I'm going to try and not let anything stop me going into teaching if it's in one form or the other. I mean again, from my experience in retail, a lot of it's the same in terms of having a lot of energy, being challenged, finding solutions, helping people, training people. I guess also… I mean, I could sit behind a desk but it wouldn't excite me that much!' (25-39, Level 4 and above, unemployed/inactive)

This example also highlights the importance that the skills acquired throughout working life can contribute to a sense of career identity. Many people referred to their (wanted) careers in relation to skills sets, for instance being good with one's hands, or finding a specific task easy from the outset (having a talent for it), or having achieved a degree or qualification and wanting a job appropriate to that.

3.1.2 Goal clarity

The way interviewees saw themselves in relation to their work, whether they had a clear idea of what their career was or could be, or at least what it should not be, had some bearing on how people intended to progress through working life, what aspirations they had and how they intended to fulfil them. Where interviewees had a clear career aim, be that working in a specific occupation, achieving a specific level of qualification, or working in a job role that matched their career values, identifying this made it easier for them to make decisions in a more planned and strategic way in order to achieve this aim. There were examples of young people in the sample with specific career goals, other young people had not had a career goal but these had firmed up over time, and other respondents were 20 years or more into their working life without a career plan.

Based on the responses, there were four groupings of how people saw their career goals and plans to implement them:

- **Clear plan with progression:** those with a clear plan who are systematically progressing with its implementation

- **Aspiration with support needs:** those with aspirations but who are unsure about how to achieve them

- **No clear goal but establishing foundations**: those with no clear aspirations but a desire to progress and who put foundations in place to enable some progression, and

- **No clear aspirations**: those with no clear aspirations who have resigned themselves to their situation.

Clear plan with progression

This group of people is quite diverse. Respondents included individuals who had a very clear idea of their career and the path they needed to follow from the outset, but also individuals who over time through exploration have identified their chosen goal and have then put into place steps towards that, which may include stopgap solutions. The example below illustrates how one woman returner who is currently studying, plans to progress in work:

> *'I probably see myself in five years' time obviously qualified but in five years' time I'd have three years post qualifying experience, so I'd probably have been working as a newly qualified social worker for the last couple of years. I'd probably at that point be looking to take the next step up because the trend is that once you've got two, three years […] under your belt, then you are able to step up to a slightly higher salary band.'* (25-39, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

Aspiration with support needs

This group contains on the one hand, individuals who face some barriers to achieving their aspirations. This may include for instance facing financial limitations, as the example below illustrates:

> *'At the moment, I can afford to go to school. At least, I can pay a part time course.[…] And you'll get at least some kind of qualification, some papers, so I can get the job what I want, and start there, to work there, and then to start doing that, I might join the college.'* (18-24, below Level 2 (including no qualifications), employed)

On the other hand, there were interviewees who decided on a career fairly early on in their life, but who had subsequently became disillusioned and were now struggling to identify clearly a new career path, such as one respondent who was trying to move out of the catering sector following health issues:

> *'I decided what I wanted to do at eight. […] There was an old couple that owned a cafe in the village […] and I used to go when she was too old to lift the tables and chairs in, so I went round and helped her and in six years I got up to cooking and that's when I decided what I wanted to do. In hindsight, I probably would have chosen something else now, because it's not been overly successful, but that was where I decided what I wanted to do. […] I'd like to do*

some training in other sectors, but I don't know what that would be until I was offered it, if that makes sense. I'd love a different change of career and do some training that would enable me to get a job in another area, but I wouldn't know what that is.' (25-39, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive)

Quite frequently individuals who had an aspiration but felt they needed support in achieving their ambition, expressed a desire to become self-employed, mainly driven by a personal preference for being independent and not wanting to receive orders from someone else. However, most of them had little idea what sort of business they wanted to have, in what industry and how to go about opening a business. They may require support in terms of developing viable business ideas.

'I still want to open a business. I don't really care what it is, as long as it's, I'm investing my money back and I'm the boss.' (18-24, Level 2 or 3, employed)

No clear goal but establishing foundation

Interviewees in this group were often quite driven in terms of wanting to prove something to themselves or family. They tended to be quite flexible, open to exploration and because of that had had very fragmented careers, as illustrated by the following example:

'I worked in two cafes, I was a care worker, I was working in a housing association […], I worked in a pizza shop. […] They are not all the same jobs, it's just any job that comes up. […] I was just applying for any, just to get a job, and just, really, it was for my mom [to] say, yes, I'm actually doing something with my life.' (18-24, below Level 2 (including no qualifications), unemployed/inactive)

These interviewees frequently cited chance events and opportunities that determined how they got into their respective jobs, rather than a clear path. Work opportunities then provided the foundation for something else they were willing to explore. Some of them had not thought about a particular career and it was someone else who suggested a particular occupation based on a particular skill or perceived talent. And while they had no clear goal, they were often quite resourceful in finding jobs.

No clear aspirations

This group of individuals often has no direction in terms of what they want to do, or clear understanding of what skills and talents they had or where their preferences lie. This may be partially due to not engaging with the topic, being at the start of a career or facing barriers that are perceived as so limiting that a change from the current situation is seen as impossible. For example:

'A lot of my friends, they've all… they're in the Army, or they've got jobs that, it's a career, not a job, if that makes sense. They've got that, and I'm just like, well, I don't even know what I want to do. […] I don't know, I just have no aspiration. I don't know what I want to do, and when and why, and where.[…] going back to how I used to be, I just want to try and get in a job, and then look for a better one,… just so I've got something to spend my day with. But I don't know really. I think that's what I'd do, just for the fact of being able… have a job and actually getting out the house, that's what I'm more keen about doing.' (18-24, below Level 2 (including no qualifications), unemployed/inactive)

The last example also highlights how social pressure from family and friends can have a negative impact on an individual's career decision-making, especially if they feel they have to overcome a barrier. Work as a social aspect, as part of social life, may become a more important factor for these individuals than having a career.

3.1.3 Career values

This section explores what people want from work, including how their career values have changed over time. To provide a more structured analysis, participants' views about their careers will be conceptualised via Schein's (2007) career anchors. Career anchors represent the self-concept of an individual's 'internal career' (the subjective sense where someone is going with their career) as opposed to their 'external career' (formal stages and roles of careers as defined by organisations and society). These self-concepts are based on:

1. *'self-perceived talents and abilities*

2. *basic values, and most important*

3. *the evolved sense of motives and needs as they pertain to the career.'*

Schein, 2007, p. 27

These anchors are thought of as a stabilising force. They are the values and motives that individuals will not give up on when having to choose, despite sometimes being unaware of their anchors. These were outlined in Table 2.2: Schein's (2007) career anchors.

The data from our interviewees suggests that individuals' career anchors changed at different life stages (eg a focus on lifestyle when leaving university, changes to a focus on security later in life) and were sometimes influenced by decisive changes in personal circumstances (eg starting a family, going through a divorce, being made redundant).

Additionally, our data revealed that not all of Schein's anchors were underlying motivations for our interviewees, and, therefore, some of them will not be covered in the remaining section below. Our data also showed there were other career values that were important, suggesting that Schein's model does not encompass all values of importance to individuals and that have an impact on people's career decision-making. Other career values that emerged from the data as being important included enjoyment of work (satisfaction) and recognition/respect.

The following gives some examples of how the anchors are represented in people's discourse about their careers and decision-making, extended by the additional values that underpinned people's decisions. It was interesting to see that some of the values were very closely related (eg the service anchor and enjoyment of work).

Security/ stability
Most individuals expressed a need for security in the form of a good or decent income from work and foreseeable routes of progression (eg working their way up). A good income signified a route to self-sufficiency and independence from benefits and other people (family, friends), which for some individuals was one of the most important factors

in their decision-making. For people in later life stages, decisions also revolved around security of pensions and the security and stability a good pension would give. Additionally, some people indicated it was acceptable to have a fragmented career history in younger years, but expressed a need to hold down a steady job as they got older as it would have implications on their ability to find work or progress.

> *'Just going travelling, you'll be like a nomad and you won't be looked on favourably because it looks like you can't hold a job down. And I thought you can only do that kind of thing when you're young, really because it just don't look good; you've got to hold a job down.'* (40+, Level 4 or above, employed)

> *'But the fact that I'm moving into a job that has a very structured progression, that is there for people who want it, that's hugely appealing.'* (25-39, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

Service or dedication to a cause

Some interviewees felt strongly about helping other people through their work, and making a difference in other people's lives; this gave them a sense of purpose. Generally, having a sense of purpose and doing something meaningful in their work was important to most respondents, however, this was not necessarily connected with helping people or being dedicated to a cause. In many cases, work in itself gave meaning and purpose. For example:

> *'You meet them all the time – people who are just sharp elbows, will do anything they can to get to their position, and that's not me at all. For me, it's about longevity and quality and making a difference. And I know that in the job I do at the moment, I make a difference, and that staff make a difference.'* (40+, Level 4 or above, employed)

> *'And when you teach them [kids with special needs] something and they get to know it and do it independently, you get that, wow, I've done that. […] You feel like you've done something and then they respect you and you've done something… wow… meaningful, I guess.'* (25-39, Level 2 or 3, employed)

Pure challenge

There were extremely few interviewees in our sample that were driven by this anchor. They often prioritised work over everything else in their lives and were driven by achievement and higher standards of living and incomes. Interviewees who were driven by challenge at one point in their lives tended to change their career values quite dramatically with life events, such as getting married or suffering health issues.

> *'Up until that point, my priorities were work, work, work, try and better myself within that job because that's how I felt that you needed to be. It was, push yourself, go for promotion, do this, do that. […] [Now] my job can sometimes be mundane but I prefer the desk that I work on now. […] I feel more settled, even though, deep down, I'm not overly happy in that role. But it's fine; it's my job. I'll do it well because it pays the bills but I do need something that I want… I like coming home from work and having a bounce in my step.'* (25-39, Level 2 or 3, employed)

> *'Profits rose. Profits rose, and that's where I got my juice from […] It was achievement of success… yes, I've done a, b, and c. I've achieved something. I've got a nice standard of living.'* (40+, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive)

Lifestyle

Lifestyle was not a strong career value for many respondents. Only a few emphasised the importance of lifestyle fitting with their work values and choosing particular jobs around this. The interviewees for whom lifestyle was important tended to be young (university graduates) who for instance wanted to go travelling and for that particular reason chose a job that would allow this. There were also some respondents that were seeking more work-life balance either because they now had children and their priorities shifted or because they had experienced work-related health problems (see section 5.2 for further discussion).

> *'So the only reason I applied for that […] was because I wanted to travel, and that was the only reason. […] anyway when I left here, I went and did summer jobs abroad to fill in the gap because I knew I could leave them.'* (40+, Level 4 or above, employed)

> *'I loved the work but after five years I was realising, everyone was saying, well, aren't you going to apply for a lectureship? And I said "two children, no way, and a husband who's away all the time" I don't want to do that.'* (40+, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

Enjoyment and work interest

Enjoyment, happiness and job satisfaction were quite closely connected with each other and it was one of the strongest drivers for people's career decisions. This was particularly visible among those interviewees that had undertaken career changes. They had realised that their initial choices did not satisfy their intellectual needs or personal values and took action to change this. In some cases this was closely connected to a service orientation, where people wanted to help others in some way. Some people that were affected by health issues also prioritised enjoyment of the work over pay because they felt they had to cope with limiting situations elsewhere, so work should be something they enjoyed, even if it meant lower or irregular pay. Some people connected their enjoyment at work with the social networks they built and the social contacts that work provided them. The work environment was seen as contributing to a great extent to the enjoyment of work.

> *'Every morning I just go with love to my job rather than just say, ah, again this morning, again that workplace. I like to do something that I enjoy.'* (25-39, Level 2 or 3, employed)

> *'And they [professors in the field] were very enthusiastic and very ready to help others to do the same. And maybe that's what I'm searching for in that I want a job that I love and then I can be of help and show others and offer them something and be and maybe have that contentment.'* (40+, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

Recognition / Respect

This aspect was a strong driver particularly for women. It was often connected to progression in work, but also with progression in family context. Often individuals made

significant career changes (eg from accountant to optometrist) because their previous work had not given them a purpose (connection to service value). Additionally, some expressed a notion of (intellectual) challenge which would give them satisfaction and external recognition.

> *'I was promoted […] and I was probably about 20, but I wasn't any longer a secretary and for me that was a really big deal. I'd moved out of that pool of, oh, you're just a secretary. – So it was about how other people saw you – Yes, and not how I saw myself. […] But for me it was about having to really branch out and break that… break out of that, because my mum had always been a secretary.'* (40+, Level 4 or above, employed)

> *'I guess, because I don't want to do something that is just really easy and that anyone could do, because then I won't feel as though I'm really doing much.'* (18-24, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive)

3.1.4   Career insight and reflection

In considering and understanding career, work and learning identity and goals, individuals reflect on past experiences, their values and identity and how they see their future career. This section presents some of the broad career ideas that interviewees had been reflecting on: the centrality of skills and qualifications to progression; the battle between heart and mind in forging their career; and gendered work and their life stage.

Centrality of skills/ qualifications to progression

Many respondents, and particularly those that identified additional support needs for themselves, had quite a clear understanding of the centrality of skills and qualifications to careers and career progressions, and generally interviewees had a positive attitude to learning and skills development. Others expressed a need for space and support from an independent person where they could explore other options (which might include additional self-study or training) or develop employability skills at a later stage in life.

> *'I have to get a skill that I can find a better job. […] without having a good skill in something it's not easy to find a job. If I cannot do anything else, changing my skill and career, and I have to find a job.'* (25-39, Level 2 or 3, employed)

Heart over mind

Frequently, participants were speaking about the enjoyment that working in the right job would bring them. They felt quite passionate about their choices. Their motivations to work differed widely from work as a social activity to an intellectually challenging experience. However, the main emphasis lay on the positive impact that their career choice had on their life, and this was often built over extensive work experience.

> *'That's why, speaking of food, there is life food, you eat it and you feel its energy. Even salad or potato, it doesn't matter. Sometimes you buy food and it is cheap food and it's like plastic. It's not alive... The same with professions; you can do it but it's not alive, it's not energy.'* (25-39, Level 4 or above, employed)

> *'Some of the decisions we make, even studying as a teenager, are fairly irrational. […] I thought I'd study what I enjoyed doing rather than what I'm particularly good at, and maybe that would have made it easier to get jobs as an*

adult. […] Maybe that is what I've always wanted, to be rewarded for my intelligence and creativity rather than being able to learn a skill and perform it.' (25-39, Level 4 or above, employed)

Gendered work and life stage

Women and older respondents (aged over 40) reflected on the impact that their gender and age had on making career choices. Older women in particular expressed that when they were young, the societal image of women and work was not focused on a career, but rather a job. Therefore, they had often taken on work that did not necessarily challenge them, but fitted in with expectations and later, family requirements. While they were not averse to career changes at a later stage in their life, some older respondents felt they had lost a bit of an edge compared to when they were young or felt they needed substantial additional support to implement the career change. This may also be influenced by the impact on their pension that a late career change or move into self-employment might have. The examples below illustrate these points (see also section 4.3 for further discussion of the impact of societal opportunities and constraints on career decision-making).

'Even though I grew up in the late 60s, there wasn't really, I mean there was but, it sounds terrible to say, you didn't think about careers as a woman, even then. Even though I was quite well advanced, even my mum was quite good, but it just didn't… you just wanted to get out and earn some money. I think it was assumed you'd get married, which I did but a lot of my friends didn't.' (40+, below Level 2 (including no qualifications), unemployed/inactive)

'The lack of confidence when I was younger definitely made a difference to the choices that I made. I made them, what I feel now for the wrong reasons. I made them, probably out of, well, lack of knowledge because when you're young you don't know what's out there. It's only when you've been out there that you realise what's out there, quite often. But looking back it was a case of, you mustn't make a fuss, you're just a girl and you don't make a fuss. And your family's not very wealthy and you don't, you're not like the girls, who all the doctors' and dentists' daughters who still went off to Oxford and Cambridge because they all knew that they were good.' (40+, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

3.2 **Personal circumstances: opportunities and constraints**

As we work our way through the factors of influence on career decision-making, in this section we provide evidence about the personal circumstances of interviewees and particularly the opportunities and constraints they place on their career decision-making (see Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2: Personal circumstances: opportunities and constraints
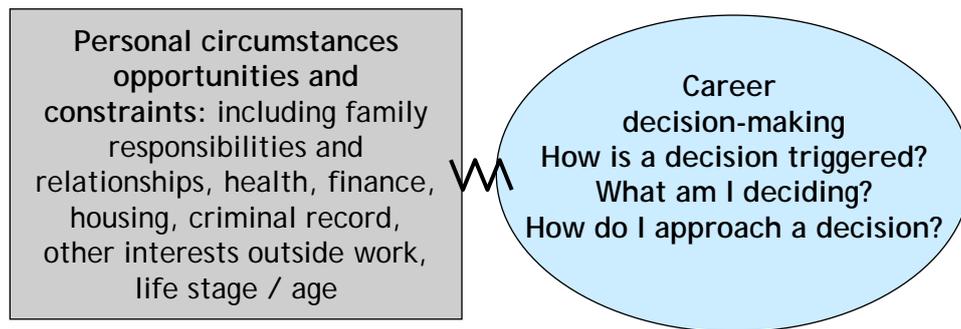
Source: IES, 2013

The interviews suggested a number of important personal considerations when making career decisions, including: family responsibilities, children and partners; life stage; mental and physical health; and other personal opportunities and constraints, such as having a criminal record and the importance of location to decision-making.

3.2.1   Family responsibilities

In this section we draw out the findings that relate to family commitments and how these factors can constrain or support career decision-making.

The importance of partners

The importance of partners in career decision-making was a strong theme that emerged from the interviews. As we will explore later, partners were a source of information and support (see section 4.2), but their working life and career also framed the context within which interviewees made decisions.

Some interviewees had partners whose career opportunities meant that they had moved geographies, leaving behind their employment and networks in the process, although some perceived there would also be more opportunities for themselves in the new location.

> *'Because my partner's work was in Manchester so we just decided to settle in Manchester.'* (25-39, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

> *'He couldn't find a way to come to me, to Venezuela to work. And so the solution was for me to leave and move to the United States.'* (40+, Level 4 and above, employed)

Interviewees' financial situations were entwined with those of their partners; partners could be a source of financial support, providing career opportunities. For example, one respondent was considering whether to take redundancy to start a Masters course, and was going to move in with her partner in order to reduce her outgoings and living costs. Partners could also have financial needs and require assistance, in some cases becoming career constraints. For example, one interviewee gave up freelance work to become an employee in order to have a more stable income and two other interviewees gave up their jobs to help support their partners or family business.

> *'We had to put lots of money to buying that lease. If I didn't go to help him, he couldn't continue. Then I have to leave my job and go and help him.'* (25-39, Level 2 or 3, employed)

Balancing work, family, and childcare

Those interviewees that had children, and who were with a partner, described a joint process of decision-making where they considered both their own and their partner's work opportunities and also childcare. Respondents had to work out how best to manage childcare (availability and affordability) alongside work as a family unit. The level, nature, and financial reward of a partner's job could have an impact on how much childcare the other partner had or was expected to take on.

Interviewees and their partners balanced the time spent working and the time spent caring for children as a couple. This could be divided into clear roles of worker and carer, for example: '*He worked there, I had the kids'* (40+, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive*).* Where it was possible for their family to manage financially, some interviewees opted to work less or even give up work in order to look after their children.

> *'My partner, he did the trips for childcare and worked part-time until we could get her into an after school club. So he did all that while I had the full-time job.'* (40+, Level 4 or above, employed)

One interviewee with children felt that she was 'unemployable' because of the requirements of providing childcare around the demands of her husband's work, which included travel and staying away from home.

> *'Two children and a husband who's away all the time…I did apply for another job but I was quite heavily pregnant and I didn't get it. And I realised that I would be unemployable for a while anyway.'* (40+, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

This interviewee therefore did not apply for a promotion and she and her husband decided that she would take a break from working until their youngest child was at school. When making this decision to take a career break, she took into account the number of dependent children she had, the expense of childcare and the family's financial situation, and the availability of support with childcare from her husband.

Support networks providing informal childcare were central to how some families balanced their work and childcare responsibilities, particularly around jobs that required flexibility with working hours and duties. Some interviewees had family that they could rely on to provide childcare. In contrast, a woman who did not have family nearby found it more difficult to combine work and childcare responsibilities:

> *'So yes, childcare is really difficult if you haven't got any family and you're looking for temp work and your job's further afield; that is quite difficult.'* (25-39, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

Family circumstances could affect the type of work interviewees sought. Childcare responsibilities meant that some interviewees felt that they could not take particular jobs.

For some interviewees, the type of work they were doing was not compatible with the pattern of formal childcare.

> *'That's when I came out of the restaurant trade because it wasn't suiting me so much. Well, you can imagine – babysitters and child-minders don't like working 'til two 'o' clock in the morning.'* (40+, Level 2 or 3, employed)

One respondent chose the type of job she did based on considerations for her son. She wanted a job in a school setting that would enable her working hours to coincide with school hours:

> *'I thought give or take, by the time he turns 10, I've got to get into a job that's term time, so when he starts secondary school, at least he'll have me there to egg him on…I can understand when he comes home with his issues…that's why I went for the school, just to accommodate my home style.'* (25-39, Level 2 or 3, employed)

Another interviewee who was looking at changing occupation wanted something that would provide financial security and hours that would provide a work-life balance.

> *'I opened up my options to something that's more flexible, for me to spend more time with the family whilst going to work. So you're not constantly at work, you come home and just sleeping and waking up and going to work.'* (25-39, unknown qualifications, unemployed, inactive)

After leaving mechanical engineering, he had considered security work due to the pay but rejected this because of the long hours required by the role and has now decided that working as a tile setter gives him the flexibility and income he needs for family life: *'You do a bit of tiling here and there and you can come home and spend the rest of the day with the family.'* (25-39, unknown qualifications, unemployed/inactive).

Like many respondents with young children, this interviewee saw a change to his working pattern as temporary, '*to get by for a few years'*, rather than something that was permanent. Other respondents had also taken on part-time time work while their children were young and intended to increase their hours as their children got older:

> *'I did do odd things... I did a local pub, did shifts in the evenings when my husband was at home…until the youngest one was 10 or 11 when I went to look for full-time work.'* (40+, below Level 2 (including no qualifications), unemployed/inactive)

It was particularly common for the female interviewees who had children to have responsibility for their children and childcare. A number of female respondents had given up work for a time to look after their children.

> *'I left my job when I had my daughter, I was supposed to go back to work when she was a little bit less than three months old but I just couldn't.'* (40+, Level 4 and above, employed)

Another woman felt that it was more common for women to have to deal with childcare issues:

> *'If you're a mother as well it's really difficult because it just seems to be an unspoken rule that, for some reason, I'm the one who has to actually stress about childcare, not my partner.'* (25-39, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

However, the career decision-making of a small number of male interviewees also considered childcare and family responsibilities:

> *'When it comes to me making decisions about work now it all revolves around my son, it's as simple as that and everything I consider has to revolve around what I need to consider about my boy, so I can't make any decisions, really until I factor in the school hours, availability outside of term time and everything else, that's what it comes down to.'* (25-39, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive male)

> *'The jobs I'm looking for now, I have to be conscious of what commitments I've got with the baby.'* (25-39, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive male)

3.2.2   Life stage

Interviewees described their careers and choices over a potentially long period of time – from when they left education to present day. As such many of their personal circumstances had changed radically over that period; for example, from having no responsibilities to supporting a family and paying a mortgage. Others discussed periods in their life where they were fortunate to have been able to rely on others (particularly parents) to help meet their financial costs while they gained work experience or needed support in order to make a career option viable. For example, one respondent discussed how they had been able to gain valuable, but low-paid work experience because they were able to move back home into their parents' house and so had no accommodation costs. Other respondents were not in such a fortunate position that they could rely on the financial support of parents, and this restricted the career options they could consider, as one respondent explained:

> *'As you get older you put reality into play and if you're not in a comfortable home environment where your parents have got plenty of money and can afford to send you off to college and get you the training, you just realise that you need to set your sights a bit lower.'* (25-39, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive)

As well as having additional responsibilities as they grew older, people's attitudes to their career changed. Some described this as 'maturing', or having found their feet as they got older. One woman described how her attitude to debt and risk had changed and how this impacted on her decision to undertake further study.

> *'I probably will have to work part-time and I'm aware of my responsibilities and things now. When I was younger, I was like, woo-hoo, spend all my money. Whereas this now, I'm doing it explicitly to not get into any more debt or anything like that.'* (25-39, Level 4 or above, employed)

Many, particularly female, interviewees talked about how their work and career priorities had changed over time, in particular after having children, with less emphasis placed on work:

> *'I did owe my children that short time to devote to them and once my youngest got that bit older then it was time to earn some money.'* (40+, below Level 2 (including no qualifications), unemployed/inactive)

There were also a few respondents starting to think about the end of their working lives, and who were driven by having a more finite working period to make career decisions and to get the most from the remainder of their working lives (see section 5.2).

3.2.3   Physical and mental health and disability

A few interviewees had been constrained in their careers due to health problems. Interviewees reported a number of different health problems and disabilities that had affected them in various ways throughout their working lives. Examples included musculoskeletal conditions such as degenerative arthritis and back problems, mental health conditions such as stress, depression and anxiety, and neurological conditions such as ME and epilepsy. A few interviewees also reported that they had learning difficulties such as dyslexia.

Most interviewees affected by health conditions maintained employment alongside managing their health conditions, although for some their work opportunities and progression were affected by their health. For example, one interviewee was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes and felt she missed out on promotion because she had a period of sick leave following her diagnosis:

> *'I went into hospital, I got diagnosed with type 1 diabetes and they weren't very helpful at all. They put my hours down and I was going for a promotion and they refused to promote me because I was off work for a week.'* (18-24, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive)

For one interviewee who was an alcoholic, his illness had meant that although he had been able to get jobs, he had never been able to hold them down for very long as his drinking would be discovered.

> *'I've always worked until [aged] 33 but I've never been in one job because of the drink. I've always been in and out of work.'* (25-39, below Level 2 (including no qualifications), unemployed/inactive)

Some people were unable to work due to their ill-health. Anxiety could be particularly debilitating, as one interviewee described: *'I was 10 years out of work because I was too frightened to open the door.'* (40+, Level 2 or 3, employed)

Other interviewees had been diagnosed with health problems whilst they were working and so had lost their job as a result, and the sudden onset of a health condition could be a trigger for career decision-making (see section 5.2).

> *'My body failed. It just didn't work any more. I couldn't go to work, I couldn't get out of bed, and it just went, just finished. I lost my apartment, I lost the pubs, I lost everything. It just went like that.'* (40+, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive)

Health issues had also affected the learning of some interviewees. One interviewee was diagnosed with ME and subsequently dropped out of her university course. She spent

several years recuperating with periods where she was unable to do anything. Another interviewee spoke about not taking up opportunities to undertake work experience at university due to their depression:

> *'I don't think I actually took advantage of what was actually there…It's a case where at the time I was going through depression, and so things were just getting on top of me.'* (18-24, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

Interviewees demonstrated a number of ways that they tried to cope with health problems in the context of making work and learning decisions. Their health condition could limit and frame the options they had to consider. For example, one woman who had anxiety and now has a place at university to study decided to start her studies at a college she knew:

> *'There's no way I could have gone too far, so I just knew that I'd be all right there. That's how it started…I knew it was like a little college so I knew I could cope with doing that because I couldn't have gone to college or anything then…I didn't have any stress about how to get anywhere because that's when I was really bad with anxiety.'* (40+, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive)

Some interviewees used training and learning as a way to start undertaking career-focused activity again after a period of ill-health. This was most likely to start at a basic level – maths and English, IT skills or recreational courses for example – that were perceived by interviewees to have less pressure than other courses or attempting to hold down a job. One interviewee described why she attended a training venue specifically set up for people with mental health problems.

> *'I just wanted to see if I could do something and it was quite nice to learn something without it being a lot of pressure.'* (25-39, Level 4 or above, employed)

It took some interviewees a long time to recover from their health conditions, and others were still managing them. Several interviewees felt that working would help or had helped their recovery. Part-time work was also used by several interviewees who had health issues as a way of rehabilitating, though for some who were managing health conditions, part-time work was their aspiration:

> *'I could do 20, 25 hours a week because I would like to earn a bit of money.'* (40+, below Level 2 (including no qualifications), unemployed/inactive)

> *'I've considered going back full-time but I can't, because I don't know how my body would react.'* (40+, Level 4 or above, employed)

3.2.4   Other personal circumstances, opportunities and constraints

There were several other influences on interviewees' personal circumstances that affected their career decision-making processes. Location was a crucial part of decision-making for many interviewees. Location covered the various locations of work, home and childcare (where relevant). Parents needed to be able to fit in drop-offs and pick-ups from childcare with their employment, as one parent described:

> *'I found a new job, completely new, in Fulham. It suited me because I could drop her in a nursery next door and still go and breastfeed her.'* (40+, Level 4 or above, employed)

Location in career decision-making could also be considered in terms of the opportunities it might offer to children, as two respondents described, the first who moved from the north of England to the south and the second who moved from England to Holland:

> *'I wanted my daughter to grow up where there were more opportunities.'* (40+, Level 4 or above, employed)

> *'[My husband] was travelling to Holland and then they [employer] asked him if he wanted to transfer there…we talked it over and we thought it was a great opportunity for my daughter to have a high quality education.'* (40+, Level 4 and above, employed)

Preference over home location also impacted choices about work, with interviewees expressing desires to live close to friends and family and to feel connected to a place:

> *'So, my career decision to move north was based on two things – one, by the poor salary for the post I was in and, two, because I was looking for a promotion and wanted to go back to the northeast of England [for family reasons].'* (40+, Level 4 or above, employed)

Other examples interviewees gave of personal factors providing opportunities and constraints to their career decision-making, was having a criminal record. One interviewee had been unable to get a job, despite passing the required training because of a conviction. He had told his employer about the offence but when the Criminal Records Bureau check came back they decided they could not employ him. Some years later, this interviewee hoped go into care work and was fearful of the impact his previous convictions might have on his chances. There were also examples of people whose families moved when they were in their teens or early adult life, and they described how this made searching for work more difficult as their networks had gone.

3.3 Psychological orientation

How interviewees were feeling about themselves and their life more generally was fundamental to their career decision-making, and their readiness to make a career decision. In many instances, respondents' level of self-confidence affected their belief that they could affect change, their attitude to risk and whether or not they preferred to accept the status quo over an (unknown) alternative. In this section we seek to explore the evidence to explain interviewees' answer to the question: 'how am I feeling about myself and my life generally?' (see Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3: Psychological orientation
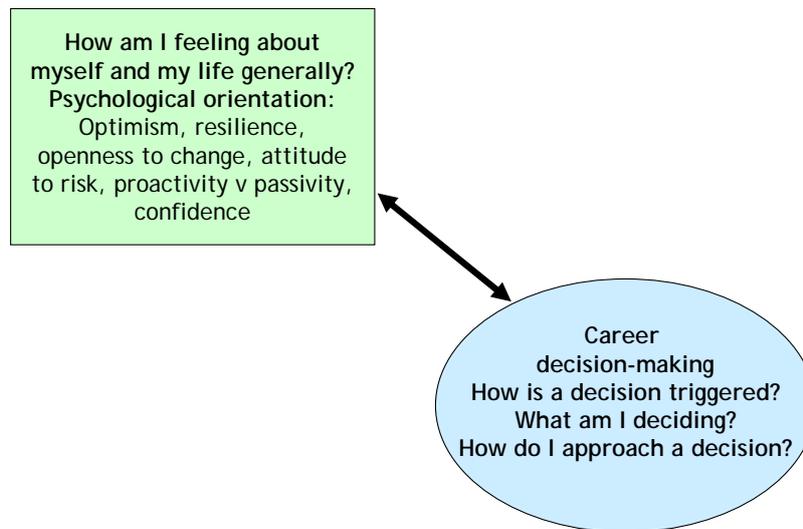
Source: IES, 2013

The contrasting examples below illustrate different levels of confidence and its influence on how people think about work and learning and what they have to offer. In the examples, the effect that positive or negative work and learning experiences have on an individual's confidence is evident. It was frequently the case that negative experiences negatively affected confidence and the likelihood that an individual would try something similar again. The first example is an employed male with qualifications below Level 2 who has learning difficulties. He described how his work-related confidence is generally low because he has dyslexia and how it further ebbed away following a move back to his birth country where he struggled to find work:

> *'I was happy and my parents were here then they moved because of their sabbatical and they ended up in England. All the family were here and everybody was happy, so I was like, it's a great time; I feel great. And then I moved with them to Israel because I felt so well, and then it stopped, because there's no work in Israel… when I came back to England I was different…less focused, less ambitious…because confidence is the most important thing, I think, whatever you do. If you're dyslexic you cannot build confidence and my confidence is really, really low. If one looks day to day...I have a laugh – being cheeky – I'm confident in that way, but I'm really in a sense, day to day, work-wise and knowing what I want to do... it's really low'.* (25-39, Level 2 or 3, employed)

The second example is a woman, now aged over 40, who described her sense of optimism at what her working life could hold when she left school with two O-levels. From an early age she said she strongly believed that she is a person who is successful at work and learning. This belief had stayed with her through her career to date and shaped her resilience and self-belief when in a redundancy/redeployment situation, where she remained positive about the situation and the contribution she could make to other job roles if required:

> *'I think, because I had a good education as well, I had confidence, and because I went to grammar school I really, truly believed that when I went out into the*

world, even though I only had two O-levels, I believed that I could go anywhere and do anything because that's what my education had given me, really. I didn't feel like I was less of a worker or less academic.'

'I think it's a sense of redeployment that I didn't feel that at all. I felt I've got loads to offer. You'll be really lucky if I take this job, actually, because I could have stopped. I could have gone out and done training, consultancy.' (40+, Level 4 or above, employed)

The third and final example of the influence of self-confidence on one's career is a woman who was aged 25-39 and who was in learning at the time of the interview. She had been employed in several different fields in the past and started and not completed several programmes of learning. In the past she saw herself as someone who fails in work and at learning, but more recently she had started to see herself as someone who could succeed at work and learning and had more confidence that she could finish her course and find a career path to settle in:

'I've quite often failed along this course of events, but then I maybe set myself too much of a challenge... I feel like I've had all my wild times, and now I just need to come down and get focused and get this degree, and I feel like I've had so much failure…so I'm really trying to knuckle down.' (25-39, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

While negative work and learning experiences had knocked the confidence of some interviewees, for others self-doubt had crept in as they reflected and compared themselves negatively to their peers and contemporaries. The quote below illustrates the experiences of someone trying to forge a career in law:

'I did a few work experience placements at barrister chambers and I found that really daunting and intimidating because everyone was uber-successful, had a 2:1 and was very confident, very controlled with their lives. That just threw me off even more! … Maybe I needed to be more gutsy at the time but I found it too intimidating.' (25-39, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

A lack of self-confidence could lead to a downward spiral, whereby interviewees closed down any work and learning opportunities that were offered to them. While they were making career decisions, these either resulted in them not taking any action, or limiting their options. For example, one man described how he had turned down the opportunity to undertake an NVQ at work as he was not confident in his ability to learn. One female interviewee aged over 40, with a qualification at Level 4 or above recalled how she limited her career options when she was younger because of her lack of self-confidence:

'I was a very shy child and I was thinking about nursing, but I had to travel. Our nearest place was 50 miles away and I wouldn't have been home… I thought, no, do something nearby.' (40+, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

Other interviewees felt that they were open to change and to career, work and learning opportunities that might come along as they could help them make the most out of future work and learning opportunities. For example:

> *'I'm a person... I like challenges and I don't mind developing in any field because it always helps somewhere in the long run'.* (25-39, Level 2 or 3, employed)

In some cases, interviewees' psychological orientation affected their confidence to force change and to create a decision-making scenario. They described needing confidence to take a risk, particularly if their career decision-making process had started as a result of self-reflection rather than had come about as the result of an external shock, such as redundancy. One example of this was a woman aged 25-39, who was employed and whose highest qualification was at Level 2 or 3. She had worked in the same sector all her working life, and was considering how best to transfer her skills and experience to work in another sector. She wanted a new challenge, but was finding it difficult to take the first steps towards making a career change: '*I'd love to start looking… I need to get the bravery to start looking elsewhere for a job' (*25-39, Level 2 or 3, employed). Other interviewees said they liked change, and some actively sought it. For example: '*I am definitely somebody who likes to be in the forefront of development and change, and I'm quite happy'* (40+, Level 4 or above, employed).

A key component of interviewees' psychological orientation that affected their career decisions was their resilience and ability to cope when things were not going smoothly, or when things got tough. In the examples below, resilience seems to be linked to factors such as the strength of the individual's belief in the career, work or learning identity that they were trying to forge. The first respondent had a very strong career goal to work in journalism, and the second respondent had a strong goal to complete a course.

> *'I had quite a few knockbacks, realising, I'm just going to probably have to go back in the situation I was before, get a job that I know I can do even if it's not in journalism, continue to do volunteering, continue to at least sell the odd article at the same time'.* (25-39, Level 4 or above, employed)

> *'A lot of people dropped out on that course; a lot, seven dropped out. I just kept going'.* (40+, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive)

Some interviewees who described themselves as lacking in confidence had found that being able to take a small risk and to re-engage with learning or with voluntary work had started a virtuous cycle of optimism, and better skills and employability. One good example of this is a respondent who said she had a poor experience at school and was bullied. She left school at the Easter before sitting her exams and started work in a factory. More recently she had a long period out of work caring for her son who is disabled. She initially saw an advert for adult education in English, Maths and IT at a local provider and found the confidence to sign up and return to education. Following her success at these courses, she then signed up to an Access to Higher Education course, and following her success at that has got a place at university. When she first returned to learning she had not dreamed that she would end up studying for a degree. She said:

> *'So, to me it wasn't really such a uni thing; it was just to give me confidence to prove that I can do this. That's why I did my Access Course and then did really well. And then I applied for uni because at the Access Course I didn't even think about even applying for uni.'*

Her advice to people lacking in confidence was:

> '*Just go for it, actually just go for it. Just go back to college or whatever, definitely. Especially if they've been at home a long time with their children, yes or an illness or anything that's made them a bit more socially excluded. Definitely, go, I'd definitely say go into a little college course first, just to get your brain… get your confidence back and just find yourself again. And then go from there into a job or whatever you want to do.*' (40+, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive)

The evidence in this section has demonstrated that an individual's psychological orientation is central to their readiness to make a career decision, as well as the choice and action they are likely to take. Underpinning the psychological aspects of career decision-making, people need to believe that change is possible and realistic. Some interviewees with low self-esteem were reluctant to take a risk and closed down work and learning opportunities as they did not want to upset the status quo, in some cases despite being unhappy. Other interviewees embraced change, and indeed some created it for themselves, broadening their horizons and feeling confident at developing their careers. Some interviewees had the confidence to take risks and to proactively engage with and search out opportunities, not necessarily knowing where they would end up or where it would lead them. Others, particularly those who had had negative work or learning experiences in the past seemed less likely to have the optimism, resilience and confidence to force career decisions. Where the force for career change is internal to an individual then confidence and self-belief is central for people to be ready to make a positive career choice.

3.4 Education, qualifications and skills

An individual's perceptions of what they can offer prospective employers – in terms of their experiences, skills and qualifications obtained from employment, education and training – is a key element informing the choices and decisions that they make in relation to their career. This relationship between education, qualifications and skills and career decision-making is dynamic. Reflecting on how an individual's skills meet employer needs, can drive them to consider re-entering formal education or work-based training in order to improve their employment prospects, or to alter the direction of their career. When parts of the labour market decline, some individuals were strong at drawing on their understanding of wider sectors of the labour market and assessing their employability. For others, considering the skills they have to offer an employer was a more difficult process.

In this section we provide evidence about how interviewees have developed their education, qualifications and skills, including their employability and job search skills. Essentially we look to understand how, when considering their careers, interviewees viewed the question 'what can I offer?'.

Figure 3.4: Education, qualifications and skills
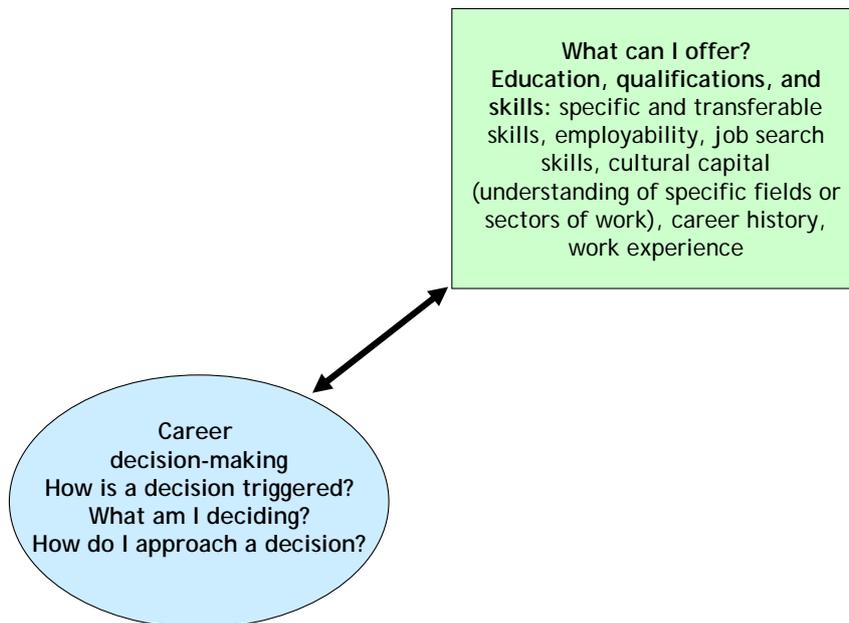
3.4.1   Influences on course choice

When making the decision whether or not to study and which course to take, interviewees considered a number of things. For those interviewees either embarking on or seriously considering entering education or training, particularly at later stages in life, a key incentive in making this decision appeared to be the employment prospects which the attainment of recognised qualifications in their respective sectors would bring. As one respondent stated, when discussing the postgraduate course which they were taking in social work:

> *'I very much think that this master's degree is very much the first rung on becoming a social worker. It qualifies me as a social worker as well as giving me that academic qualification.'* (25-39, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

Other interviewees made similar remarks in the context of their own career trajectory:

> *'The only reason I wanted a degree was to get a better job as a secretary because I noticed [for] all the top secretary jobs you needed a degree.'* (40+, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

A selection of interviewees displayed a different motive for considering either continuing or re-entering education, again seeing the potential move as an insurance plan in case they failed to find employment within their preferred area of work, or if their current position were to be terminated. Some respondents, however, believed that it was, *'slightly absurd'* that it was necessary for them to acquire a formal qualification in order to secure their preferred job role, despite them having years of experience in the field.

In terms of the learning choices which respondents made when they were still at school, the influence of their immediate social networks appeared to have the greatest impact on these decisions, in comparison with other factors such as respondents' own career

ambitions. This may be attributed to the fact that, at this age, many of the interviewees did not have a career and were still at quite a formative stage in their career thinking.

Some interviewees spoke of the influence of others on their learning choices, such as having a '*great teacher*', and their decision to study a subject at university or college. Others described the financial and emotional support and encouragement they received from family members and partners, and how this helped them to stick with their particular course choice when short-term employment opportunities and scholarships for less well suited course options presented themselves.

Despite an acknowledgement of the job opportunities which could potentially be accessed through the acquisition of formal qualifications, for some interviewees there were real and perceived obstacles which prevented them from taking a particular route. Several interviewees discussed the direct and indirect costs of university or college courses (discussed further in section 4.1.2), as well as a perceived lack of support, information and advice about the educational opportunities open to them (see section 4.2.4).

3.4.2   The relevance of the learning choices to careers

The sample of interviewees included people with low, intermediate and higher level qualifications. Many interviewees held a 'portfolio' of qualifications and certificates gained from periods in learning throughout their lives. These qualifications and learning experiences were often varied, with different subjects and levels, rather than building neatly in the same field one after the other, progressing to higher and higher levels.

Some interviewees followed a traditional educational path, proceeding directly from school to college and then on to university, consciously attempting to tailor their course choices to particular career paths. Others were less sure about where their path of academic study might lead them and made education decisions based on other aspects, such as interest in the subject. In one example, a respondent selected their GCSEs and A-levels with a view to studying medicine at university, while leaving the option open to pursue another area of interest at a later date: land management. However, after achieving lower grades than required to take a medical degree, this interviewee had to decide whether to pursue a degree within the area of health care or land management; the two career options they felt were left open to them as a result of their subject choices. The respondent opted for health care, feeling that this subject would be perceived by family and friends as being more academically challenging than the latter. We discuss later the important influence of friends and family on career decisions (section 4.1). The influence of social networks on interviewees' decision-making appeared particularly strong while respondents were still in education and had yet to experience the world of work.

Staying with the case of the same interviewee, after training to be a physiotherapist at university and spending a number of months on placement, they began to find the work too emotionally demanding and decided to pursue a career in what had been their back-up career choice, land management, beginning with an MSc in the subject. They now reflected that their years of specialism in health care, and in particular in physiotherapy, was a potential barrier when applying for land management jobs, due to the incongruence between these two subjects. Mapping qualifications history to chosen career fields and how to present the skills and experience gained from them to employers were areas that several interviewees discussed they considered when making career decisions.

A group of respondents held a wide range of quite disparate qualifications and licences. One respondent who had originally completed an NVQ in mechanical engineering, but who had left this career behind as he found it too low paid, went on to obtain a SIA Door Supervisor licence and a Passenger Carrying Vehicle licence, having brief careers within each area as a doorman and a bus driver respectively. Similarly, another interviewee initially trained and ran a business in the area of massage therapy, before taking an OU course in Environmental Science and a subsequent degree in Horticulture at the Royal Agricultural College.

Despite the fact that, in each case, the qualifications held by the respondent did not always relate to each other, in the respondents' views this tended not to have a negative impact on their employability. On the contrary, this group of interviewees felt that these qualifications were something to fall back on if their current career path faltered. As the respondent who held a qualification in massage therapy commented:

> *'Whenever I need money, I just go and massage people, and it's great, and I'm quite good at it, and it's really easy for me.'* (25-39, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

Other interviewees felt that their formal education had been particularly useful and relevant in helping them to obtain their current work role. These interviewees clearly identified a direct link between their ability to attain what was, in each case, a more senior position than their previous job role, and their recent acquisition of specialist qualifications within this particular field. Almost universally, this appears to have been a conscious decision on the individual's behalf to try and improve their career prospects. As one respondent commented:

> *'The only reason I am where I am, and that I can come home early and that I can manage a team of people… is because I went back and I got my degree, because if I hadn't got my degree, I'd only be earning this much money and I wouldn't be able to have got these jobs'.* (40+, Level 4 or above, employed)

Another interviewee offered similar sentiments; discussing the relevance of the content of a recently completed college course, they observed that:

> *'I could [now] say, I've got these exams, and it was… yes, definitely. I think, it was the one thing that got me offered the job … the employer was impressed that I'd gone to college.'* (40+, Level 2 or 3, employed)

It is worth noting that both of these respondents went back into formal education after being in work for a period of time, having originally left school with very few or no formal qualifications. This may therefore help explain both interviewees' decisions to re-enter education in order to improve their opportunities for career progression – a route which, in their view, appeared to be the best way to achieve this end – alongside any knowledge which they may have acquired while in work of the types of qualifications that are deemed relevant by employers within their respective sectors. Following a period in work it was common for respondents to reflect on their career (see section 5.2).

3.4.3   Experiences of education and effect on decision-making

The experience of education affected several interviewees' career decision-making. Some interviewees felt that, during their education, there was a lack of opportunities to pursue the subjects which they were interested in and to which they felt they were best suited. This meant that respondents had either to reconsider their potential career path or look for alternative ways to acquire the education and the training that they wanted.

For example, one respondent decided to go to catering college after they had finished school. As part of their training, however, students were expected to learn how to wait tables as well as how to prepare food. As it was only really food preparation which interested this respondent, they decided to leave the course after a year and complete the second level of their NVQ through the hospital where they had been catering part time. As the interviewee observed: *'I could train there and be paid and become a chef… so I left college after a year and did my Level 2 there'* (25-39, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive).

Others reflected that they were not well-suited to the academic style of learning that currently predominates within schools and universities, and felt that this form of education did not suit their learning style, which was more hands on and practical. In a few instances this meant that individuals struggled at school. Some went on to pursue vocational courses. However, this did not always mean that respondents overcame the difficulties which they encountered in school. As one respondent, who joined a local catering college, put it:

> *'I wasn't overly good at school, I'm more practical than I am being able to sit down and do exams. I did catering all of my life and I got ungraded in my food exam because I just couldn't get my head around the paperwork side of it.'* (25-39, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive)

Interviewees commented on the effect education has had on their self-confidence, providing accounts of both positive and negative experiences (see section 3.3). A selection of interviewees, for instance, felt that the type of educational setting which they found themselves in, at certain times in their life, had a negative impact on their self-confidence and their capacity to learn. Respondents tended to identify feelings of intimidation as central to this experience. This included respondents feeling unable to speak up if they did not understand the content of the course for fear of looking unintelligent in front of their peers, or due to the number of students in a group. As one respondent described, in relation to their experience of higher education at a prestigious university:

> *'The course was mental… sat in a room of 250 people. Not understanding a word they say and not feeling I could say, excuse me, I don't get that, there's 200 people there. If there's a group of five people I am perfectly happy to say, I have no idea what you're talking about. Sitting next to someone that has four As at A-Level… I most definitely didn't.'* (25-39, Level 4 or above, employed)

In contrast, there were several examples of learning increasing self-confidence and optimism (see also section 3.3). One respondent who went back to college to refresh their basic skills in English and Maths and to take an IT course talked about the boost which re-entering education had given to their self-confidence. In their view, college had given them renewed belief in their capacity to learn, and provided a social setting in which they were able to learn more about themselves. Some of the other respondents who discussed the

positive impact which learning has had on their self-confidence had undertaken courses through providers such as *learndirect*. As a result of taking short courses, such as these, interviewees felt better equipped and more confident in dealing with difficult situations which they encountered at work.

3.4.4 Mapping foreign qualifications to UK standards

Another recurring issue among interviewees who had immigrated to the UK concerned the perceived value of foreign qualifications in the UK labour market. In particular, respondents who had originally been educated outside of the European Union, sometimes within private institutions, felt that their training was no longer relevant as there was no formally recognised UK equivalent for their qualifications. As one interviewee stated:

> *'When I moved here I studied English and then I tried to translate my qualification to just compare it with the qualification here to get a job, but they said because it was in a private university, it's not very valuable. Then I have to start from scratch again.'* (25-39, Level 2 or 3, employed)

A similar observation was made by another interviewee who acknowledged that, although they have had all their exam certificates translated, they still do not believe that they would be accepted by employers. In each case, the interviewee felt that they had to be educated for a time and obtain formal qualifications within the UK in order to acquire gainful employment here, within a reasonably paid position. As a consequence, both interviewees had either completed or were due to begin college courses within their stated fields of interest.

The issue of equivalency for individuals who hold foreign qualifications appears to impact upon their career decision-making as they consider what they can offer in the labour market. It tended to drive respondents to consider how they could best improve and certify their employability in the eyes of potential employers. Respondents seemed to feel that the educational route in the UK was the best way to achieve this end.

3.4.5 Employability, transferable skills and decision-making

Several interviewees held positive views of their own employability. Some of these perceptions related to the relative ease with which respondents believed they could find work, or had found work in the past, such as one respondent who remarked that they had, '*never found it difficult to find work*'. Views on employability were also affected by the state of the labour market (see section 4.1.1).

Other interviewees appeared to have a great deal of confidence in their suitability for particular job roles. These included positions such as catering and charity administration. Respondents felt that their previous experience within similar positions meant that they could easily adapt to, and work well within, such roles. In one example, an interviewee was therefore resolutely committed to acquiring this type of work as it was their ideal job role. In other cases, however, this was simply one role among many that interviewees were willing to consider in order to find work.

In contrast to these views, a group of interviewees explicitly doubted their ability to find work and to impress prospective employers. These respondents tended to be more constrained and to have greater barriers to work. These doubts centred on a wide range of

issues; some respondents felt that they were discriminated against due to their age, whereas others believed that their ill-health meant that they were viewed as a potential liability by organisations. Particularly prominent issues which arose from participant responses in this area, however, concerned a perceived lack of recent and relevant qualifications, work experience and skills. This is perhaps a reflection of the fact that many of these interviewees were out of work at the time of interview, and had been so intermittently for a significant period. Being out of work for a period of time seemed to adversely affect interviewees' perceptions of their employability and knock their belief in the skills and attributes they had to offer an employer.

A few respondents, for example, were aggrieved that although they had years of experience within their preferred line of work, they were currently unable to find employment because, as they saw it, they lacked the basic qualifications and certification now required by industry. This was part of what they saw as a general trend within the labour market towards needing to certify skills. One respondent, who had previously worked as an electrician, described the reasons for their current unemployment as such*: 'I haven't got any qualifications. I have got no paperwork, but I've got 30-odd years' experience, so I know what I'm doing'* (40+, below Level 2 (including no qualifications), unemployed/inactive).

These issues seemed to drive individuals to consider other lines of work when coupled with other factors, such as increased competition and an apparent lack of jobs within their particular field. Where these barriers did not exist, however, respondents were open to the prospect of re-training, especially if it meant increasing their chances of finding employment. Indeed, these sentiments were echoed by respondents commenting on their perceived lack of recent and relevant work experience and transferable skills.

A selection of interviewees were able to recognise and express their transferable skills and relevant experiences, as well as the value of these attributes in performing particular job functions and finding employment. As one respondent, who had previously worked for a funeral director, commented, when discussing an administrative role which they were applying for at a charity providing support for ex-servicemen:

> *'It's office admin, which is what I've done for the funeral directors. It's making appointments and filing. But, it's dealing with people with post-traumatic stress disorder, which my brother-in-law suffered from. I've got a personal connection with the PTSD. …you need to be sympathetic and empathetic to families because obviously they might be having a tough time of it, if they're going through a trauma. Which is great, because I've got that side of it from the funerals… I feel like I've done everything I can to get a job that's suited to me and my skills.'* (40+, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive)

Other interviewees expressed similar views, even after they had unsuccessfully applied for roles which they believed they were well suited to. One respondent, discussing an unsuccessful application they had recently made to become an Ofsted inspector, observed that they still felt they would have been, *'a really good inspector'* because they are, *'very good at challenging'*. Indeed, these responses seem to suggest that respondents were not going to let these experiences deter them from applying for positions outside of their direct field of employment based on their transferable skills in the future.

As well as relevant skills, some interviewees also discussed that they exhibited the right behaviours and attitudes necessary to get on in work, and to progress within their careers. As one individual stated when outlining the reasons why, when working for the local council, they attained a first-level management secondment within a publically funded library:

> *'When I went into the secondment thing for the Grade 5, that was the other reason why I got it, because I was the only person who bothered to do the free NVQ the year before [in Library and Information Studies], so I'd, obviously, shown I was interested'.* (25-39, Level 4 or above, employed)

In this way, more active respondents who tended to look at their work and learning options and to reflect on their skills and experience evidenced an understanding of the need to continue to develop what they have to offer within the labour market, as well as the importance of maintaining a positive attitude towards learning and being proactive in taking advantage of the learning opportunities available to them.

In some instances, interviewees – after considering what they have to offer employers, alongside the availability of different kinds of work – were proactively reshaping their career identities. In some cases, this process was taking place within a sector or industry that respondents had previously worked in. The interviewee who worked previously as an electrician, for example, told of how he has broadened his search for relevant training and employment to the entire construction industry. This tendency evidences the respondent's understanding of certain areas of work, as well as their awareness of and willingness to exploit this cultural capital in order to find employment.

In other cases, after reflecting on what they have to offer an employer, or their potential, respondents began to pursue vastly different career paths. These more dramatic re-evaluations tended to be driven by long-standing personal interests and the perceptions that participants had developed, while in work, of the type of roles to which they are best suited.

3.5 Conclusions

When making career decisions, individuals are considering their innate characteristics and career and wider values (such as those outlined by Schien in Chapter 2), their personal circumstances, opportunities and constraints. They are processing lots of different types of information and require a developed sense of self-awareness in order to be able to do this effectively. In doing this, part of an individual's decision-making will not be conscious (see Chapter 2). However, in terms of the conscious side of a career decision-making process, as individuals think about and articulate how they see their future, how they are feeling about themselves and their life more generally, and what they can offer to employers, they are in the process of making career decisions. Some respondents had high levels of self-awareness, others may need support to discuss their careers and develop the skills to reflect (see delivery implication B3). The sources of information and support that individuals used will be discussed further in Chapter 4 alongside the other social and systemic opportunities and constraints affecting career decision-making. The importance

of partners was highlighted, with many career decisions being taken jointly and the influence and support of others is further explored in Chapter 4.

A few interviewees did not have a clear idea of their career direction or aspiration, whereas for others this was more defined. Whether or not an individual has a planned career direction does not limit the extent to which they are required to make career decisions, but may shape the type of decision-making style they use, as will be explored in Chapter 5.

4 External factors affecting career decision-making and sources of information and support

In this chapter we draw out the influences on an individual's career decision-making relating to society, the labour market, and their sources of information and support: the factors external to the individual. This does not describe the decision-making process itself (this is discussed in Chapter 5), but rather the factors that influence a decision, and the type of decision-making style used by individuals. In this chapter, each of the external factors influencing career decision-making is discussed in turn. First we explore how respondents experience the labour market and the opportunities and constraints they face. Next we present the findings about the sources of information and support that individuals use to help them make career decisions, before looking more broadly at how social and systemic opportunities and constraints influence career decision-making. A diagram at the start of each section illustrates the dimensions that are included within each of the influences. It also illustrates how the factor interacts with career decision-making. Where factors tend to be determined by the individual and have a two-way relationship with career decision-making, their relationship is denoted by a double-headed arrow. Where factors tend to be factual opportunities and constraints relating to an individual's circumstances these are illustrated relating to career decision-making by a zigzag, denoting a relationship, but with less direct control.

Key findings

The recent economic climate has had marked effects on the employment situation of interviewees and the real and perceived work opportunities available to them. Several interviewees had experienced redundancy and many of those who were out of work felt that it was increasingly challenging to find employment in their local labour markets.

Many interviewees had used learning to progress their career. However, there were several respondents who spoke about wanting to further their studies, but being constrained by access to finance. This was particularly an issue for people in their mid-career.

Family and friends were an important source of support for work and learning decisions. Generally, individuals are supported by several people at once, or at least over the course of their career, and the types or groups of people consulted can change over a person's life time. The advice and support received may be contradictory and so can cause difficulties in deciding who to listen to.

Families could sometimes set expectations which influenced interviewees – these expectations could be perceived as too high (stretching) or too low (limiting) – and affected individuals in different ways. Expectations could encourage individuals to achieve more, but equally they could discourage individuals from taking action in case of failure or indeed could push them to rebel and take a contrary path. Expectations

---

appeared to set frameworks within which individuals made decisions and took action. Sometimes these expectations were rooted in family tradition and seen as a responsibility, but could also reflect wider social norms about what is the normal or right thing to do.

Many adults developed and/or drew on wider social networks comprising: friends of friends, current and former work/study colleagues and employers, teachers and tutors, and individuals in specific job roles. These networks appeared to be particularly useful for information and insight rather than guidance, and were less widely used than family and friends in supporting decisions.

Adults also used internet-based resources to inform their career decision-making. The most commonly mentioned use was for finding and applying for jobs. Other uses mentioned included researching potential occupations or employers, and researching learning options. In a few cases, interviewees accessed more practical support online such as chatting online to an advisor, using tools to build a CV or assess their skills, or to access free learning. Most users were positive about the internet in supporting career decisions as it was something in their control that could be accessed at the right time and pace for them and allowed them to be proactive. It was quick, impersonal, and provided them with a range of information. However there were some concerns around the reliability and currency of the data, and that using the internet effectively required both technical and research skills.

A small group of interviewees reported using formal careers services – accessed via social workers, learning providers or jobcentres. In many cases this was the National Careers Service (NCS), although many interviewees were either unaware that this support was being delivered by NCS or were unaware of the support that they could access via NCS. Several interviewees felt the help they had received was with job search skills, including CV writing, but that they did not get sufficient support helping them to make sense of their opportunities and constraints, and to develop their understanding of their interests and preferences.

4.1 Labour market and learning opportunities and constraints

This section presents the evidence about how interviewees understood and perceived their labour market and learning opportunities and constraints. Other factors that affect career decision-making, such as an individual's personal circumstances, opportunities and constraints, impact on how they interact with the labour and learning market and their perceived and real labour and learning market opportunities and constraints.

Figure 4.1: Labour market opportunities and constraints
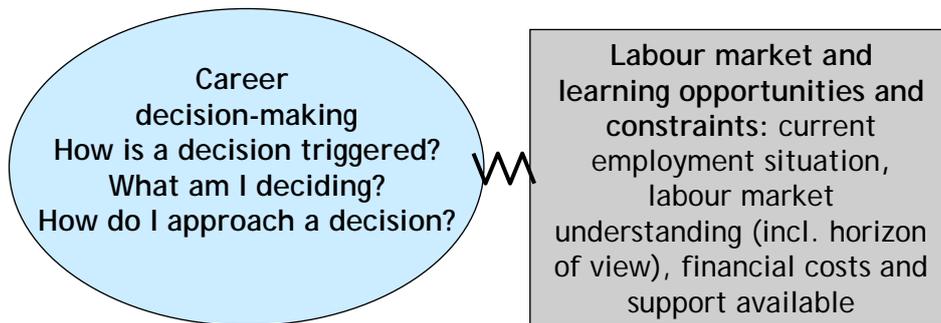
Source: IES, 2013

4.1.1 Labour market opportunities and constraints

Overall, the effect of recent labour market changes on interviewees' careers was influenced by the other factors that affect career decision-making, such as education, qualifications and skills and career identity, and whether they worked in an industry that was growing or declining. For many interviewees, the recent economic climate has had marked effects on their employment situation and the real and perceived work opportunities that are available to them.

Several interviewees reflected on the ease with which they had been able to find employment in the past compared with now. For example:

> *'Going back 20 years ago, there was an extraordinary lot of work for everybody. Everybody was busy. Nowadays, nobody's busy. Nobody's got any work, unless you want to go into the caring business. You have a look on the job site... carers. Pages and pages of people wanting carers.'* (40+, below Level 2 (including no qualifications), unemployed/inactive)

> *'This was October 2006 or so and there really was a boom then and if you even give your details to one agent they're on the phone to you weekly, and all you had to do was just put your CV out there and agents were just jumping on you. It's the complete opposite now.'* (40+, Level 4 or above, employed)

The changes in the number and type of job opportunities, particularly those available in the public and third sector, may influence how individuals make career decisions. There was a perception that work opportunities were not as plentiful now as they had been in the past, which had led to a shift in the balance of power away from potential applicants to the recruiting employer, as one respondent explained:

> *'I think the whole negative reporting on the economy and the cutbacks in council services and the charity sector, I think it all makes us feel very panicky so we feel that we just have to grab any opportunity that's out there to get ahead. Now you almost feel you don't have a choice, it's almost like you're lucky to get an interview or to be selected'.* (25-39, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

While nationally there has been a recession, the extent to which respondents' labour market opportunities were affected depended on the structure of the labour market they lived in. Some interviewees discussed how the effects were felt in their local area, as one respondent who was unemployed, but who had previously worked as an electrician explained:

> *'The work isn't brilliant, so they're not taking any people on, and if they lay people off they're not replacing them, because they're not getting the work to keep up with the level of the people they've got working for them. So trying to find electrical work is a nightmare.'* (40+, below Level 2 (including no qualifications), unemployed/inactive)

Interviewees in the two rural fieldwork areas, County Durham and Gloucestershire, were more likely than interviewees in urban areas to mention that transport and the availability of opportunities within a realistic travel time (without a car) were difficult to find. For example:

> *'There's nothing, really. There's nothing going for nobody, nothing like that... Everything for retail work is Newcastle and things like that. I can't travel there, get there every day, so it's awkward'.* (18-24, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive)

A concern for several interviewees with dependent children was how available labour market opportunities might fit with their childcare responsibilities and whether there were available positions and flexible employers that could accommodate their preferences. One unemployed respondent had previously worked in catering which required a lot of evening and weekend work, he now had childcare responsibilities for his son during these times, so felt that the available opportunities in the industry he had experience in no longer matched his personal circumstances. He explained:

> *'There are a lot of jobs around if you want them. I could go tomorrow and get a job in a pub, but... it won't tie in with my family life'.* (25-39, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive)

Another father who was a lone parent living in a rural area without access to a car described how the available labour market opportunities did not fit with his personal circumstances:

> *'It's like a virtual impossibility with the school hours and the amount of school holidays they have, the actual jobs in this town, which is a small town. Various jobs are going in Cheltenham or Swindon, but as I say that's an hour trip, so I drop my son off at nine, I take an hour's bus, that's now ten o'clock then I have to get to the job, which say from a bus town centre, 15 minutes. Then I have to leave that job at say 1:45 to be able to get back in time to pick my son up.'* (25-39, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive)

Respondents' understanding of the labour market came from a number of places, including their work experience, hearing about the work experiences of others, and researching opportunities, for example by regularly reviewing job vacancies that could be of interest. Most respondents had quite a narrow field of vision and tended to research or try to keep abreast of opportunities in a limited number of job types. The choice of the job roles to keep updated about were informed by their existing type of work, work they had

done in the past, or work they were considering for the future.

A large source of information about the labour market was through social networks, but interviewees also discussed how they gained understanding through using job advert information and reviewing person specifications for vacancies. Some interviewees had looked at job adverts for positions they thought they might like, and reviewed the extent to which they were a good match to the position and decided that they needed to develop their skills if they wanted to work in that field. For example:

> *'Part of the reason, the only reason I wanted a degree was to get a better job as a secretary because I noticed all the top secretary jobs you needed a degree'.* (25-39, Level 2 or 3, employed)

Interviewees used job adverts to try to decide whether a job opportunity was going to be a good match to the factors they considered when making a career decision, including their personal circumstances. Interviewees with children, for example, needed to know the core hours of positions, whether they would be expected to work away from a regular place or work or to stay overnight. One respondent noted that job adverts don't always contain this level of detailed information:

> *'Quite often 50 per cent of the jobs you look at, it won't tell you the proper hours, it will just say 30 hours a week, 40 hours a week, it won't say start and stop times. There are lots of details they miss out.'* (25-39, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive)

Other key pieces of information that people wanted to know before they would make a decision whether or not to apply for a job included the salary, qualifications required for the position, and the types of activity the successful applicant would be expected to undertake. Some interviewees described how they were confident to call an employer to obtain further details about a position to inform their decision whether or not to apply for a vacancy, as one respondent explained:

> *'All the main things I want to know in terms of salary, location, job roles and then also in terms of the level of experience that they require, whether it's newly qualified or requiring two, three years of post-qualifying experience. So there's certainly enough information there for me to put in an application. Or even just call or email and have a chat, which is the more… that seems to be very popular now.'* (25-39, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

4.1.2 Learning opportunities and constraints

For many interviewees a period in learning had enabled them to progress their career, find work, or to move into another type of work. However, when discussing their current situation, several interviewees spoke about wanting to learn but being constrained by access to finance. This was particularly an issue for interviewees in their mid-career, some of whom felt they had made poor choices in earlier learning. In addition to the direct costs of learning, some interviewees also spoke about the opportunity costs of learning, for example if they were unable to work alongside studying. Interviewees did not mention the availability of appropriate courses as an issue, suggesting that there was sufficient supply of relevant learning opportunities.

One group of interviewees considering learning rejected it as a viable option after looking at the headline costs. This group included people who were working, as well as people who were unemployed, and people with highest previous qualification levels from below Level 2 to Level 4 and above. The costs of learning depended on the length and level of the programme. Some interviewees described courses that would have cost a few hundred pounds which they felt would have made a difference to their career options, and other described investments of several thousand pounds. The examples below illustrate the range of learning opportunities that interviewees were considering, but felt unable to take-up due to their cost:

> *'I would love to do SQLs [Structured Query Language], to be an SQL database administrator…I looked into it, but it's too expensive; I really would love to become an SQL database administrator. It's not a real high up-job, it's just something… I love databases, and I'd love to get more into it and find out how they work and be able to network one. But I just could not afford… Had I been earning a wage that I was earning a few years ago, I would have paid for it myself, but it's just out of my ability anymore. And there's no way of getting free training for something like that.'* (40+, Level 2 or 3, employed)

> *'They said "well, take your forklift". How am I going to take my forklift? I'm on jobseeker's money. I can't afford to take the course. So it's just a vicious circle, round and round and round all the time'.* (40+, below Level 2 (including no qualifications), unemployed/inactive)

Interviewees who were not deterred by the headline costs of learning sometimes struggled to work through the costs in more detail, including their access to any loans. Some interviewees needed to consider the financial implications of studying over a longer time horizon than they were able to find information for and voiced concerns that their eligibility for support or the level of funding might change part way through their course.

The first example below illustrates one case where an individual in her late thirties was trying to work out the costs of retraining to work as an ophthalmologist. She was trying to explore the costs of different routes to progress into that occupation: first by doing an Access to Higher Education course and then a degree; and also other shorter higher level vocational courses that could help her to enter the profession. She was trying to calculate the course costs, including travel, whether or not she would be eligible for loans or bursaries, and the financial implications for her household budget, including the loss of her current earnings and working tax credit:

> *'I have contacted with Student Finance and they said maybe I'm eligible for the costs of the fee of the university. They said everyone once can use this finance and because I haven't used that, I can be eligible…Then maybe I can count on that, but I'm not 100% sure. They said I cannot apply now to see if I'm eligible or not because I cannot go to university in September 2013…they said at the moment it's too soon to apply to see if you can be eligible for that loan or not, for 2013. You have to be at least maybe six months before that to apply…I have to ask college how much does it cost. I have to ask them if there are places I can have for that fee. I have to ask them how much material do I need during the one year course and then I have to see if it's three times a week course, how much does it cost for me to just go to London and come back and everything...If I am a student means I'm not available for doing, as I said,*

employment and then I don't get that money from Government, and then I have to just rely on my husband's job. Then if I don't get any help for the college fee and travel costs, it is really difficult.' (25-39, Level 2 or 3, employed)

Another individual was part way through a two year programme to qualify her as a social worker, and was still unsure about the financing of her second year. She described the uncertainty:

'It's one of those things that you very much never know what's going to come out until you start doing it. So even when I had my bursary letter through and it felt like it was going to be very, very tight on the amounts you think, until you give that definitive, yes, I'm going to do it, no, I'm not going to do it, because you just didn't know how it… until you started doing it and doing the daily commute, it was only then that you knew whether or not it was going to work out. I can see there are a lot of reasons why, and you've got responsibilities and why you wouldn't choose to go back to training because funding for this is very much on a year by year basis, so you can't… the level of funding I've got this year, there's no guarantee that I'll get next year. And so you think, well, there's that huge thing as well, if I do one year it doesn't qualify me for anything so it would be a waste of a year if then the funding is gone next year and it's impossible to complete. So yes, a lot of questions and it is mainly a financial one as to… it was only the finances that was going to stop me from doing this course and from retraining.' (25-39, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

A few interviewees had started courses and had not completed them because of unforeseen costs, such as one respondent who completed only part of a Masters programme: *'I started a Masters in sustainable design but because I couldn't afford the fees I did about half of it' (*40+, Level 4 or above, employed).

Sources of information and support have a central role in helping individuals to understand the costs of learning, to develop a realistic budget and to then be able to take an informed decision.

4.2 **Sources of information and support**

'I'm quite happy to take advice. I'm not all-knowing or seeing, not at all.' (40+, below Level 2 (including no qualifications), employed)

In this section we provide evidence about how interviewees have made use of various sources of information, advice and support about work and learning. Essentially we look to answer the question, 'what and who can inform my choice?'.

Figure 4.2: Sources of information and support
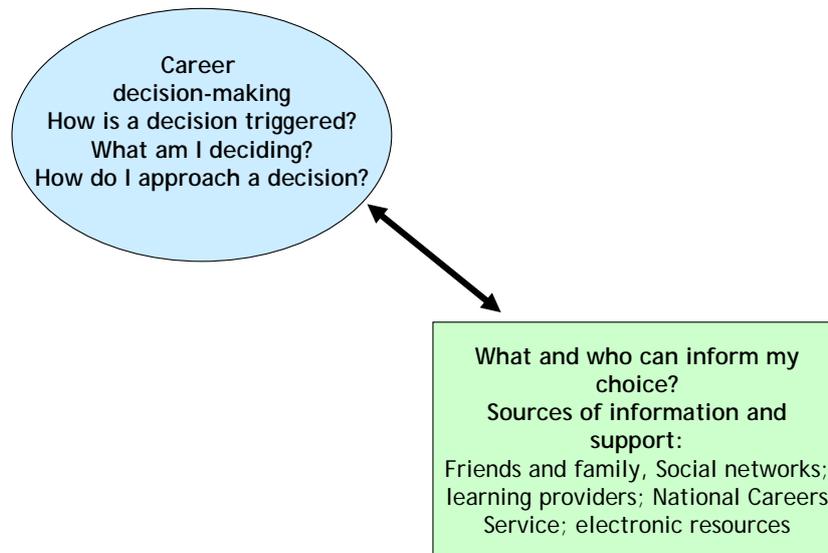
The interviews suggested a number of categories of support – from the informal to more formal sources – including: friends and family, wider social networks, electronic resources, learning providers, and careers services (particularly the NCS). For each type of support we draw out (where appropriate) whether and how these sources have helped them in their decision-making.

4.2.1 Friends and family

Importance of family and friends to decisions

For many individuals, with different backgrounds and characteristics, family, friends and partners (including girlfriends and boyfriends early in life) were clearly **a regular and important source of IAG in making career decisions and for many interviewees helped to inform their labour market understanding**. This conclusion was reached because almost all of the interviewees spoke of family and friends when discussing their work and learning decisions. This informal source of support was also trusted, as interviewees generally felt that their friends and family had the interviewees' best interests at heart and that they knew them well (perhaps better than they knew themselves): *'Other people have known me better than I've known myself, I think. That's why I'm like, okay, I have to learn to go with it, because they seem to know what's good for me.'* (25-39, Level 4 or above, employed). Interviewees appeared to seek and receive support from several individuals within their family and friendship circle, rather than relying on one particular individual. There were many examples whereby the support of family and friends was cumulative – with information and advice from various sources adding together in a reinforcing way to help the interviewee to confirm and refine their choices. For example one young student talked about her study choices:

'I had a friend who was on the physiotherapy course with me and she didn't go on to do physiotherapy, so she was good to chat to. And I had another friend who subsequently had left therapy, and also my boyfriend who's just finishing his medical degree – he could see that I wasn't happy and was very

encouraging, and my mum was brilliant as well. So there were plenty of friends and family that I spoke to.' (18-24, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

However, for others the information and advice they sought and received was contradictory, leaving them with the decision about which person to listen to and be influenced by and which to ignore.

The research interviews also indicated that the ways in which family and friends provided support could manifest in numerous ways, as with the ways in which interviewees made use of their friends and family when thinking about careers, and finding work and learning.

Providing a gentle nudge or a safe space to discuss options

Sometimes this support was a gentle nudge towards a certain direction, helping the individual to consider something new by providing information about an area of work; or, even more broadly, providing a safe space to discuss and open-up options in a non-judgemental way. Examples here included: providing job insights, advice about careers that would be easy to get into and find jobs, suggestions to start your own business, and general discussions about potential careers. Over time there appeared to be a move away from receiving this kind of support from friends and family and a move towards relying on partners. It would appear that this kind of support is benign, considered helpful and ultimately allows the individual to make up their own mind. Indeed, one interviewee noted how she could go to any of her four brothers for information or advice, all of whom were in different occupations, but that she felt she needed to make decisions for herself*:*

> *'They [my brothers] can only help me so far and I think it's a journey on my own because I think you can get help from people but then I think I've not really made the effort. I've listened to what you said and I've written it down. I'd rather put what I think, what I feel, and express my own opinion and my self thoughts. So, yes, I do ask for certain answers, but then I just jot them down and think I'll either use them or I won't.'* (25-39, Level 2 or 3, employed)

Specific suggestions and practical advice

Support from family and friends could be a little more active or directional, with these individuals providing interviewees with very specific suggestions and practical advice. Interviewees talked of receiving advice on how to get started in a career by taking up voluntary work, or how to get funding for their studies, or help with making a decision about one course of action or another such as choosing between two jobs, suggesting a certain occupation, or providing information about a college or course that they were attending: *'I know that as my friend is going to [College], I can find out everything from her, all the info and then she was saying, you can do that, and they're offering that, and the opportunities are quite many there'* (18-24, below Level 2 (including no qualifications), employed).

Information about job opportunities

Family and friends could be a useful source of information about job opportunities, often broadening an individual's understanding of the labour market. For many interviewees, their family members and friends could be part of different networks to their own, and so via this source they could get to hear about a wider or different set of job opportunities. This was not the case for all interviewees, however, and one talked about

how his friends had limited networks and experiences and so he would not look to them for finding work.

Practical help to get work

A key message from the interviews was that family and friends often provided practical help to get work. There were numerous examples of immediate family members or close friends helping interviewees to find and secure work, often in the same organisation, if not the same role as the family member/friend. This involved informing the interviewee about specific job or work experience opportunities, providing them with an 'introduction' to the right people (i.e. those making the hiring decisions), and putting in a good word for them. For some interviewees, these jobs had been starter jobs, getting them into the labour market and on to a career ladder, and there was a sense that these facilitated entry points were trusted: *'if your dad's getting you a job; number one, you feel you have to take it, and, number two, you think, well, it can't be that bad because he's not going to put you in a really rubbish job'* (25-39, Level 2 or 3, employed). For others, these jobs had been the start of a lengthy and secure period of employment:

> *'Every job I've had, I've heard about through friends. They say, "oh, there's a job..". When I went to work for the building company in [town], I knew a bloke who was a plasterer. I'd known him for 10 years. He said "oh, they're looking for somebody to drive the lorry". So I just went up and introduced myself, and I said "well, [name of friend] told me I could come up and see you". He said "have you driven a lorry before?" I said "no". He said "well, I'll teach you then". And then I got the job, and I stayed there for seven years, driving the lorry, which was a good job.'* (40+, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive)

There were also numerous examples of family and friends providing practical help with searching for and applying for jobs – helping individuals with online job-search, filling in application forms, writing tailored personal statements and covering letters, and providing practical advice on how to approach an interview including what to wear. For example, one interviewee spoke of how her friend (who had HR experience) helped her to apply for jobs, and to submit effective application forms, and another spoke of the support she receiving looking for jobs online:

> *'I had a very good friend who worked in HR, she was high up in HR. She said "well the art is in the paperwork", she said "the art is in the filling in forms because then you get it…" so I said "I'd like something secure like local government, or something like that", and they had a security job going in the local government, for the civic centre, for the building itself. And she said "why don't you apply for that?" I said "well I've got no experience and that". She said "you'll be surprised". So, she took me through the form and helped me with it… She came round the house and she trained me.'* (40+, below Level 2 (including no qualifications), unemployed/inactive)

> *'Because I'm dyslexic I find it really hard to do, especially computer work. My daughter does a lot of that for me: my job searches and stuff, you know, she'll do it… my youngest daughter, she's 17 now, she'll say to me "mum, if you're struggling I'll come round; I'll do it all on the computer; print it all out".'* (40+, below Level 2 (including no qualifications), unemployed/inactive)

Not all interviewees wanted support from their families

A small number of interviewees talked about purposively not consulting with their families when making decisions about work or having unhelpful or even upsetting discussions. They spoke of feeling patronised and being firmly steered in a particular direction. For others, family were simply not a resource they could use to help with career decisions either because they had little or no living relatives, no relatives in the country or because their goals were very different to those of their parents, as the following examples illustrate:

'I do, and I find that if I talk to people it just annoys me because it's almost like … by the time I talk to people, it's almost like I've made my decision. So I decided to quit my job and I just rang my dad and said "I've made my decision. Will you support me or not?".' (40+, Level 4 or above, employed)

'My mum and dad cared about me, but they weren't clever like I was, so it was a bit of a shock to them that they'd got this really bright kid that was coming top of the class all the time, and I don't think they ever really knew how to relate to me and so that didn't really help. I couldn't really talk to them, because all they'd say was "oh, I don't know where she gets it from".' (40+, Level 2 or 3, employed)

4.2.2   Wider social networks

Use and make-up of wider social networks

Adults also drew on wider social networks to provide them with information and advice about and support with work and learning decisions, these could include friends of friends, current and former work/study colleagues, teachers and tutors, and individuals in specific job roles (sought out because of their job role). These types of individuals were mentioned less frequently than family and friends, however for those interviewees who spoke of these sources, they could often be a great resource particularly in terms of information to support career decisions and indeed some interviewees appeared to be very adept at tapping into these wider networks.

Chance encounters

There were examples of support provided by friends of friends happening by chance rather than deliberately being sought out. Interviewees spoke of meeting or being introduced to new people through friends at social events, people who during conversation might unprompted provide information or advice. Interviewees also spoke about when talking with friends about their choices and decisions, these friends could pass on the relevant experiences of their other friends. In these ways, interviewees could gain advice about job opportunities with a particular organisation, providing insight into a particular role or information about a way of working (such as working freelance).

'I was at this 30th and a friend of a friend worked – it was either the V&A [Victoria and Albert Museum] or the Science Museum – it was one of the Kensington museums, and they really enjoyed it there and I'd been talking about working on the radio, and I guess didn't feel at that point I had enough journalistic experience to start shopping around my radio portfolio as it was. But they said "you worked in shops, you worked on the radio. You've probably got the transferable skills that would get you a job in a museum doing something curator-y….". I think it was another birthday party. I was saying "I'm not happy at

the [name of employer]. I think my job's in danger…" a friend of a friend said "I work at the Museum of London and I know that they're recruiting in the AV [Audio Visual] department there". So I sent a letter to their HR [Human Resources] department and they said "yes, indeed we are looking for another member of staff" and so I sent in my CV [Curriculum Vitae], they asked me for an interview and I got that job.' (25-39, Level 4 or above, employed)

Strategic activity

A few interviewees spoke of deliberately seeking out individuals outside of their normal networks (these could be friends of friends, or people they know only by reputation) who they felt would be able to help them by providing an insight into an occupation or industry or personal experience of how to approach career development in a particular field. This was a form of research which informed their career decision-making process:

'So the new chief exec, everyone's got really high hopes, and she comes from a social work background. So I was thinking, maybe I should just go and talk to her. How did you get from there to here? I should just interview with her.' (40+, Level 4 or above, employed)

'I now ask people, people I know who do similar sorts of things. How did you get there? What did you do…? There's a local college near us and… somebody told me oh, so-and-so works there. Go and ask them. How did they get in? And they tell me how it works and what people need so I know what I need if I wanted to work at that college, what they're looking at.' (40+, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

Others spoke about developing and making use of networks around work and study, comprised of: work colleagues and those in the industry, former work colleagues, fellow and former students, and former employers. These networks were particularly important in maintaining commitment to learning, keeping abreast of labour market issues, finding out about job opportunities and preparing for and getting (new) work (indeed several interviewees talked about these networks in terms of knowing the right people and being able to name drop). One interviewee talked about how her work network kept her informed of what was happening in the organisation whilst she was on a career break, enabling her to position herself to return to work in the restructured organisation; and another spoke of how a former employer had contacted him with an offer of some work:

'While I was off on my career break all of the [organisation's] IT was outsourced to [an American company]. … they [Line Manager] said it would be quite a good idea to be in position when this happens, because then you too will be outsourced to [the American company], and they have to keep you on the same terms and conditions, so you'll carry on with your two days a week, etc. I was going back anyway, but it was thought to be a good idea to be in position as well, because if you're not careful when that sort of thing happens, you can drop through the cracks, if you're not there, and I didn't want that to happen, because I knew I would want to go back.' (40+, Level 4 or above, employed)

'I had a month's work just before Christmas. My old boss rang me up... well, my old boss... it's his son that runs the company now. I've known Steve for 30 years, nearly, and he rang me up. He said "I need a hand for a month". He said "it's only for four weeks, mind". I said "fine, that's brilliant" just before Christmas

as it gave me some money. So I went and worked for him for a month just before Christmas, which was brilliant. He said "if work picks up, I'll give you a bell, which he will".' (40+, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive)

Teachers and tutors could also be part of the wider social network of support, supporting and influencing interviewees whilst they were in the learning environment but also as a resource after their studies to help with labour market entry. Others in these wider networks could include: fellow members of the church congregation or community groups, other parents or teachers at the schools of interviewees' children. For example:

'The lecturers would help me, because I was a good student. Yes, so my lecturers, I don't know, they always liked me and so they would recommend me. So, that internship that I did, the one for teaching children, one of my lecturers just recommended me and said "you apply and go and do this and this".' (18-24, Level 4 and above, employed)

4.2.3   Internet-based resources

Using the internet for Jobsearch

The majority of interviewees also used internet-based resources, and named several different sites that they used (note that these internet users were not just those who were drawn from the NCS web sample). **In the main, those using the internet were primarily doing so to search for and apply for jobs.**

Interviewees had different approaches to online jobsearch – some used recruitment agency sites (although a couple were very negative about agency sites), some used local websites (such as local press or local councils), some used sites focused on particular occupations or industries, some went direct to particular employers and searched their websites (e.g. NHS, Civil Service), and others spread their net more widely and used national media websites and public sites such as Jobcentre Plus and the new Universal Jobmatch. Other sites mentioned included: Indeed in Reed, Total Jobs, Skills Pages, Gumtree, Community Net, Jobs Go Public.

The search approach tended to depend on interviewees' career history and employment record, their goals and family commitments. These searches were not always successful, resulting in too many jobs, unsuitable jobs, or jobs with insufficient information. Interviewees spoke of wanting to know where jobs were located, how much they paid, precise details about the working hours (not just total hours but expected start and finish times), how much experience was needed and what qualifications were expected; and that sometimes this information was not available (perhaps requiring a follow-up phone call).

A few interviewees, who were internet users, spoke of using social networking sites such as Linkedin to find contacts in particular roles or industries – someone to make direct contact with to ask about job opportunities; or sites such as Facebook to put out a call for a job.

Wider uses of the internet

Interviewees also used the internet for gathering other types of information such as general information about occupations and potential employers, to find out about developments in their field of expertise, to find out about funding for courses and benefit entitlement, and also to find out about courses. For example:

'I think, for the Civil Service Fast Track, they have a Facebook page, which, some of the graduates go in and just explain their story, and I think, that was quite useful for me to understand if that was a career option that I wanted.' (18-24, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive)

'I searched the internet in which college or which places I can have a course, and then I found this website. It was the National Careers Service, it was something different then, and then I really liked it because any kind of career you put in that website search, you could get lots of information. For example, they can give you for optometry which kind of qualification you need, which kind of university you can go, which kind of job you need to expect to do when you finish your study, how much wages, how many hours per week you need to work. You can get lots of different information that you cannot get in any other places. Then I just stick to that and just get the information, everything I need.' (25-39, Level 2 or 3, employed)

Some interviewees also talked about using the internet to access practical help, in one case this involved chatting online to a careers adviser, in other cases this involved accessing online tools to assess their skills, develop an action plan or build a CV (offered via the NCS Website). This more interactive support was accessed and positively viewed by the interviewees who used it:

'I keep forgetting what it's called, who I did the lifelong learning with, National Careers was very good. It took quite a long time but… I had to answer all these strange questions, a bit like a Mensa test, do you know what I mean?… it was very strange when you do it, some you were really good at and some of the others, you just go, you can't see that at all…I took about eight or nine hours, all together, … I think they are asking you things that you wouldn't normally give over in a discussion, sort of thing. That was very helpful, I've got to say… I think it was a skills evaluation, they can read into you, from that, that you might have skills to offer that you don't know you've got.' (40+, below Level 2 (including no qualifications), unemployed/inactive)

Benefits and challenges of using the internet to support career decisions

Those who spoke about the internet tended to be very positive about it and its usefulness. They talked about how using the internet was something they could control, so they could use it when it suited them and at a pace that suited them – which could allow them to build in some 'thinking' time: *'I decided I'd rather do things by the paper or online. It gives me more chance, as well, to read it thoroughly, go on the website and read about the business and location and then decide from there whether or not I'd apply for a job there.'* (25-39, Level 2 or 3, employed).

Some liked the impersonal nature of the internet:

'[likes looking online] because you haven't got to talk to people; I've still a little bit of that anxiety there for me, as well. I like just looking online…And also when you phone up people they want to know your ins and outs, don't they? Where you live, it's just, I'm just asking something basic. When you're online it doesn't matter, does it? It's like, I just rang up to ask a question; you don't need my life story.' (40+, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive*)*

However, other interviewees would still prefer personal contact by phone or face-to-face, particularly for advice rather than for gathering information:

> *'I feel like I'm getting something and the person is listening. Because if you're on the phone or on the internet writing to somebody it doesn't mean that the other guy is actually listening to you or paying attention to what you're writing. So, it feels like this is more of an intimate way of doing stuff.'* (25-39, Level 2 or 3, employed)

Other benefits of the internet as an information resource to support decision-making were that it can be fast, providing information immediately, that it provides access to vast quantities and a wide breadth of information, and enables adults to feel as if they are doing something proactive. Indeed for many users, the internet was the first port of call: *'The internet. It would have been impossible without the internet. Yes, I think, it's just that whole thing nowadays; it's just all about the internet, really'* (25-39, Level 4 or above, employed).

There were some concerns raised however about the information available on the internet – that the information could be out of date and that it could often be overwhelming with too much to wade through particularly if you do not know what you are looking for, or that the technology itself could be unreliable. A few interviewees felt that to use the internet effectively as a resource for supporting career decisions you needed confidence and the right skills: technical skills to get to grips with terminology and general processes involved such as inputting data; and research skills to know what you are looking for, as one interviewee explained:

> *'I sometimes find job web sites a bit confusing… I wouldn't consider myself as computer illiterate but I do sometimes feel like… I'll type in [something] specific and I'll end up trawling through pages after pages, looking for jobs and not being… They're not very descriptive and they're really not very helpful…. it'll give you a generic description on loads of the same jobs for different companies, so I find that frustrating. Sometimes that, for myself anyway, can be quite off-putting because, after a few pages, I'll give up.'* (25-39, Level 2 or 3, employed)

4.2.4 Formal careers advice including the National Careers Service

Need for formal support

Adults also gain information and support for their work and learning decisions from a wide variety of other sources and as interviewees talked about their career journeys and life histories they reflected upon not just recent sources of support but those they had accessed at earlier and often pivotal stages in their lives. It is perhaps worth noting here that some of these earlier sources may no longer exist or may have changed since they were critiqued for the better or indeed worse in the intervening years.

A small number of interviewees talked explicitly about wanting more support and formal careers advice from independent experts rather than discussing their options informally with friends and family or undertaking internet based research.

> *'It would be nice if I could sit down, maybe, with somebody not connected to my work and maybe look at where I could go. I don't want to be lazy or for somebody to just say, right, this is what you need to do, we've got you this, you*

can go there, blah, blah. I'm willing to work at it myself but I just think that, because I've never had to do that throughout my life… I've never had to go and fight for a job, I've never had to… I've never really had to be interviewed properly for a job. Even moving from my last company to this one, it was a very informal interview. He knew my abilities and, if anything, they approached me, rather than me approach them.' (25-39, Level 2 or 3, employed)

'I need, basically, somebody like yourself [interviewer] in a different setting. I talk and I say, "oh, this looks interesting"; it could be interesting for that. And then you get a perspective of, okay, he likes this, he likes that, he's quite enthusiastic in this perspective to try something. Then they give you an idea and they send you to somewhere, then you work from there, or say, actually, if you study this and go to this...' (25-39, Level 2 or 3, employed)

However, as noted by one interviewee, this formal support was not always perceived to be available:

'But I think it was quite difficult for me to get some careers advice unless I paid for it and I wasn't in a position to pay for it even though, on the face of it, it seemed like I had a good job and was better off than long-term unemployed people, etc. But you still can't afford to pay for careers privately.' (25-39, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

National Careers Service

Many of these interviewees found or were referred to the NCS, most commonly by Jobcentre Plus (not all those commenting on and /or receiving help from the NCS were from our NCS sample). They were helped with a variety of issues: from finding the right course that would suit them, advice on how to gain insight into an occupation through undertaking voluntary work experience, identifying and sometimes providing activities and training to improve job chances *'to get something on my CV'* (40+, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive), broadening horizons to consider a wider range of opportunities, learning how to use social media to find jobs, and writing or improving a CV, to thinking about potential options and what people want to do. Interviewees were helped by phone but more talked about face-to-face support. Some interviewees received this more formal careers help from elsewhere such as a social worker or from their college or university (see other sources of support below).

In the main, this type of formal help was appreciated, particularly the time that they were given, the expertise, knowledge and enthusiasm of the advisors, and the opportunity to reflect and assess:

'I do think that it does help seeing a careers' person because they are enthusiastic but they're realistic….I've only been once and I've got two more because you get three free visits if you're not on benefits. And, yes, I do, I think they've been very helpful because I saw it as a great big, like a big bowl of soup and I didn't know where to start. And I feel that they've helped me put into order, this is what you need to do; this, this and this. I've worked on three things and that's what I'm doing… I can see why they suggested the things they suggested for me. Why it would be helpful for me. Also a bit of confidence because I think going out doing voluntary work, doing some courses, you're out in the world

again after being in the house with young children and singing nursery rhymes all day.' (40+, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

'…they did make me feel there's someone there to ask. I feel really confident that I can ring them up about anything and they'll give me the best advice they can, so that is good that they're there if you need to talk to them. I think, what I figured was I need to formulate questions to ask them, so that they know what to focus on, rather than me not being quite sure what I need.' (40+, Level 2 or 3, employed)

However not everyone was positive about this type of support or took it up when offered. Interviewees spoke about feeling that an outsider would not know them well enough to be able to help; or that when helped they felt this didn't give them anything extra, on top of help received elsewhere, or that they had found for themselves. For example:

'I called the NCS. I think at this point, I was already getting ideas of what skills and key competencies are, so when it came to my CV, they didn't really have much more to tell me, so I had already covered everything.' (18-24, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

'Well, you see him three times, and that's your lot. So I thought, well, what's the point in going back again? Might as well keep on looking myself.' (40+, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive)

On balance there appeared to be limited awareness of the NCS, particularly the phone and face-to-face support it could offer. Many interviewees, when probed, had either not heard of it or confused it with Jobcentre Plus (as the local Jobcentre was often the referral or access point). This was the case even amongst interviewees who were known to be NCS users as this was how we had accessed their contact details through the sample. One interviewee described their awareness of the NCS:

'But it's a far more general place that you can go to for advice and I didn't know that this organisation existed, so they certainly need better PR and advertising, and almost, it feels like they're a company or organisation that needs to be integrated far more into the Jobcentre, because it was the first useful time that I spent in that building, after having signed on for two months.' (25-39, Level 4 or above, employed)

Support in learning environments

In reflecting upon their career journeys and life histories, many interviewees talked about the support that was available to them at school, college and university (and to some extent, voluntary and community centres and libraries). This included: student welfare support to help with finance; learning mentors/ personal tutors to help with learning and personal issues; lecturers, tutors and teachers who could inspire and advise (but also discourage and demotivate); events such as careers fairs to provide information; and dedicated careers services to help with transitions. These sources could provide practical information such as information about finances and fees to help with learning decisions, encouragement, advice on further study and/or post study employment options (eg that 50 per cent of graduate vacancies do not require a particular degree subject), help with CVs, and help to identify potential employers. Most interviewees spoke positively about the support available to them in learning environments:

> *'On my Access Course I spoke to my mentor a lot because when I found out I had dyslexia I was just going to give up that course; I just thought I'm really thick and it's like, oh, this is awful. But then no, I just carried on, did really well.'* (40+, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive)

> *'Yes they're [college careers service] really good, I've been to them, our personal tutors and our tutors also – the course leader, they're all really positive about finding a job and are happy to help on that front so I don't feel stranded.'* (18-24, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

There were a few interviewees who felt this support was not helpful or appropriate. For example, one interviewee spoke of how the careers support at her college was geared towards those aiming for university, which she was not planning to do. Others spoke about the careers support at their university which they felt was not geared up to advise people thinking about non-traditional careers (eg moving into journalism from fine art) or did not encourage people to think creatively about their options, as these examples illustrate:

> *'I think I probably did visit the [university] career department once or twice but if you're a practising artist at [university] then it's all about selling your work, getting an agent, getting your stuff in galleries, which is a traditional career path.'* (25-39, Level 4 or above, employed)

> *'The careers advice at the time wasn't very creative. I think you just came up with an idea and they would pursue it rather than actually taking a holistic approach and saying, okay, you do these subjects, you're taking an interest in these areas, actually, there are other areas that you will be interested in like charity work, community work, international development.'* (25-39, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

Support from Jobcentre Plus (and associated organisations)

Those who were unemployed spoke about information and advice to support their career decision-making from Jobcentre Plus and related Private Employment Service Providers (such as A4E), but tended to be quite critical of the support received. The criticisms levelled were that the support was not personal enough, did not meet their expectations, and lacked continuity. Many felt this support was either inappropriate for them as it was aimed at getting unemployed people into work (of any kind) rather than supporting them in their employment goals or helping employed people to change or develop in their careers; or was not available to them because of their circumstances. Several interviewees felt they were not being listened to, and that the service was not taking account of their needs and ambitions. For example:

> *'I'm signing on at the moment and they don't provide courses or anything. They don't say this is a list of courses that you can take and we'll pay for half or whatever it is. They don't do that. It's not really helpful when you go to the Jobcentre because you get people, sometimes they know what they're talking about and sometimes they can't be bothered with you.'* (25-39, unknown qualifications, unemployed, inactive)

> *'The Jobcentre, where I thought, not only will they have jobs that I can apply for, but they will have the support that I need to write a CV, to give me ideas about interviews. I'm 42 and I've never had an interview or written a CV or, and you*

just think… I needed help. And basically the Jobcentre's answer was, I had to sign up, I had to claim benefits in order to get any help… Then it gets complicated because there's issues with my divorce and with money that makes me not want to sign on. So, I'm in this catch-22, if I sign on it's going to cause me massive problems with my financials and with my divorce, and if I don't sign on I don't get any help. And without any help, I felt like I can't get a job and if I can't get a job, I can't pay my rent, I can't buy food. I'm stuck, I'm in a real no man's land.' (40+, Level 2 or 3, unemployed)

4.2.5 Other sources

Interviewees also spoke about the media as a resource for providing work or learning information. This included national and local newspapers and TV advertising campaigns: eg the Gremlins Literacy campaign. They spoke about local and community organisations, their employers including HR departments for answers to specific queries, recruitment agencies, social workers (including support workers) and targeted support agencies. As with other sources of information and support, some respondents had found the information provided by other sources to be of great value, and others had not found them helpful. The following quotes illustrate support from an HR department and alcohol recovery support organisation:

'The only thing I did ask was the HR department where I am, if I carry on working past 60, what are the options with my pension? Can I take it, and carry on working? Or do I have to…? Is it frozen? Or what happens with it? And they said "well, you can either carry on contributing or you can stop it and take it".' (40+, Level 4 or above, employed)

'[name] given me all the advice and she pointed me in the right direction, they've not said do this and do that; they've just said here's what we got to offer you, here's what we can do for you and it's up to you to take it onboard… [Y]our recovery is a big issue but it's also what are you going to do through your recovery because we've been in this shell and this denial all this long, you've got to face reality and this is what you're going to need; this is what you need to do. Here are all the leaflets that we've got, if you want to do it then do it. That's the help, it's up to yourself; if you don't want to do it then that's it. They've been a great help.' (25-39, below Level 2 (including no qualifications), unemployed/inactive)

4.2.6 No social support

Relying upon oneself

It is also worth noting that in the narratives individuals themselves were a resource, as interviewees spoke about the self-directed research that they undertook and the confidence and trust they had in themselves to move forward in a particular direction, take a particular action and make decisions. This would include researching an occupation (perhaps by speaking to those in the role, see also wider support networks); making speculative applications to selected employers, or (as noted earlier) searching websites for jobs or courses. For some interviewees, this self directed research and confident decision-making was undertaken with other forms of social support but for others this was very much a solo activity and they felt they did not have or did not need any other support. The latter group often talked about not being the type of person who takes advice or to ask for help. For example:

'I'd sort of made my own mind up that they [driving, retail] were viable options. I'm not sure there's anything that anyone else could have said to me that would have changed my mind or anything…I think I'd mull it over myself rather than having a chat with anyone. I don't think that there's a great deal that anyone else would be able to say to me that would alter my mindset. If I'd decided I wanted to do a job in driving and someone said, that's not a good idea, I'd still do it anyway, I don't think it would make any difference…I think because I've never had to ask anyone or ask anyone's advice or opinions or anything, it's just... there's not something... there's people that would talk about every aspect of their life and I just, I don't know... I've never been like that.' (25-39, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive)

'I would be the last person to ask for help… I don't how to answer the question because I have to make sure I will struggle and suffer for very long time until it's really evident and extremely embarrassing I ask for help, other's help.' (25-39, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive)

4.3 Social influences: opportunities and constraints

Individuals operate within family, and wider social and political environments, which not only provide them with access to information, advice and support but can also encourage and hinder their choices and actions. In this section we therefore explore these social and systemic opportunities and constraints. These include social and cultural norms and the influences of the views of others and their decision-making, essentially the expectations individuals perceive they have to live up to, expectations placed on them by their families and peers as well as wider social expectations. Other social influences include employer attitudes and workplace cultures, and working practices (see Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3: Social influences: opportunities and constraints
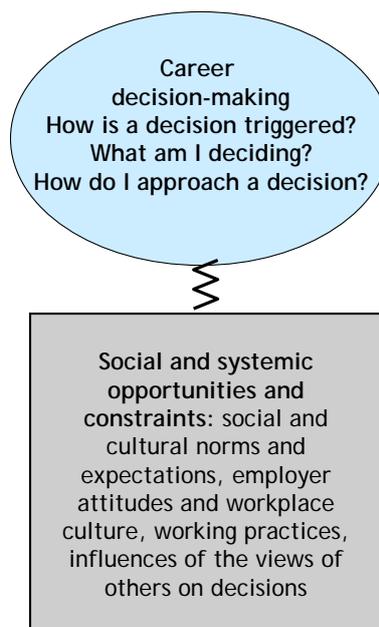
Source: IES, 2013

4.3.1   The importance of positive encouragement

The life stories of the interviewees indicate the strong influence that families and friends can have on individuals – both positive and negative. Families and friends can provide individuals with encouragement to strive to achieve and to consider different options, by nurturing a sense of self-belief and by helping them to have confidence in their decision-making. The follow examples illustrate the ways in which interviewees were supported:

- One interviewee spoke of how her friend worked in HR and was very encouraging and supportive, gently pushing her to believe in herself and her abilities and to apply for jobs: *'She [friend] was amazing actually. I couldn't have, generally, got on without her input and her help. She said "I know it sounds ridiculous, but it's literally word for word you have to do it". She was amazing, very helpful.'* (40+, below Level 2 (including no qualifications), unemployed/inactive).

- One interviewee spoke about the important role her mother had in encouraging her and keeping her ambitions alive (which was against her father's expectations):

  'When I was young I wanted to be a surgeon. So, my mum used to call me surgeon. And when I reached senior one and senior two I had this good agriculture teacher. Though he used to teach me I just liked agriculture and so one day I went back home and I told my mum I'm taking agriculture, and she was so disappointed but then she realised that she has to support us, because my mum has always supported us, so she said "okay, if this is what you have chosen I will support you in that". And she used to encourage me... my mum is someone you can just come and throw an idea at and she's just, okay, if that's what you want I'll support you…I think she's one person that encourages me…My mother always says "oh okay", so I know she is always going to encourage me and she will listen to me and understand what I want and since she knows what I've always wanted right from the start, she encourages me basing on that.' (18-24, Level 4 and above, employed).

- Another spoke of the importance of the support from her husband in making the decision to return to study: *'he was incredibly supportive because he still works within social housing and so he realises that unless he finds another job or changes career then his salary is very stagnant. So if I am doing the training for a career that has a lot of potential for development and obviously a decent starting salary, he sees the benefit of that just as I do.'* (25-39, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive).

- Another spoke of the encouragement she received from friends: *'When I told my friends about what the job is and what the charity does, they go, God, you'd be really good at that, I can see you doing that, I think you'd be brilliant at it.'* (40+, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive).

This type of encouraging and reinforcing influence could also come from employers and teachers. For example, one interviewee spoke of the encouragement provided by a prospective employer to consider wider options, encouragement which set her upon a successful career:

'I just really wanted to move job. I didn't choose the civil service, but they were the only people who were recruiting at the time. And I hadn't intended to do IT then. It hadn't really crossed my mind, because I hadn't enjoyed it very much when I did it as a module in my degree, but when I went for the interview, they said, with the sort of scores that I was getting with my aptitude test, had I thought of doing… they called it ADP the, Automatic Data Processing, and I hadn't – and they say, well, you should do this extra set of tests if you're interested, and maybe you go into that, and that's what I did…it hadn't occurred to me to go into IT at all, and that's what I've done ever since. So that was just a happy chance, really, that they looked at my scores, and obviously they saw as my aptitudes, and suggested it, because I thought I didn't like it, from university.' (40+, Level 4 or above, employed)

4.3.2   Role models

For a few interviewees, the personal experiences of others (parents, wider family and friends) had been influential, acting as role models in how to manage their career and the types of occupations they considered. For example, one interviewee talked about how her mother had demonstrated that career change later in life was possible:

'…she [mother] was getting different jobs. She had a job in PR and was organising events and that was a real break from what she'd been doing all my life, and I think I saw her and it was… so a lot of that was influenced by my Mum as well, having had those jobs and being really capable but never having the opportunity to really shine or to really develop' (40+, Level 4 or above, employed)

Another spoke of how her friend was an inspiration to her: *'I've got a mate, she's just started doing a Science degree through the Open University and it's a BA... I was so put off by this whole idea that because I'd never done a Computing Degree or anything like that, I wouldn't be able to do it, but the fact that she's actually, doing a full Science Degree with no background in science, she's doing it because she's really interested in science, and I could do that'* (25-39, Level 4 or above, employed).

Another interview said: '*my dad used to work on farms, when he was younger, and he used to tell me a few stories. I think that's probably what inspired me in the first place'* (25-39, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive).

4.3.3   The influence of expectations

Interviewees spoke of the expectations of their families, and to a certain extent friends, which they felt had influenced their decisions. Expectations for the interviewee could be set too low, and this could be perceived as not pushing or encouraging them, or at worst expecting them to achieve nothing at all. In contrast, the expectations of others could be set too high. These expectations, whether perceived as too stretching or too limiting, had differential effects on individuals: it could spur them on to achieve more, either exactly what was expected of them (living up to family expectations) or more than was expected; it could discourage them from trying (and potentially failing); or could push them to rebel and take a contrary path. In effect these expectations set frameworks within which individuals made decisions and took action:

'I'll tell you what my mum said to me, I'd be in the gutter by the time I'm 16 and I'll have about three kids. So I wanted to try and prove to her that I wouldn't be… [The social work team,] they basically said "you don't want to be a bum sitting at the sides of the street wanting money". So they basically just told me all about homelessness and how it affected me, how it affects my health, just going, really, into depth with it. I can't remember completely; it was quite a while ago, but they were basically just saying, if you carry on being how you are, this will happen. And I got a bit scared. I just thought I'd end up sitting in a street with a sleeping bag, with no teeth. And I was like, no, no, I can't do that. I can't have no teeth.' (18-24, below Level 2 (including no qualifications), unemployed/inactive)

'That's the thing as well; you're easily influenced by your friends and stuff, what your friends are doing or what your mum and dad want or I'm going to make my mum and dad unhappy if I don't do this job. But it's not what I want; it's what everyone else wants. It's like oh, what do you do, where are you working? Oh, I'm working in games or whatever it is. You are easily influenced by your friends and family and stuff.' (25-39, unknown qualifications, unemployed, inactive)

On occasion. these expectations were focused on further and higher education, and one interview spoke of how her parents had wanted and expected her to go to university and follow in the footsteps of her brother but when she was younger, she had rebelled against this. Another said*: 'My mum's been telling me for years, you've got to go to university or you're going to end up working in Tesco's. No one listens to their mum, do they?'* (40+, Level 4 or above, employed). These experiences differ from those of another interviewee who felt that her mother would laugh at her ambition to go to university: *'it just wasn't ever expected of any of us, really. It was just, you leave school at 16, go to work, still very much in that mind-frame.'* (40+, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive). Another interviewee spoke of how her family had quite a negative view of higher education and how she subsequently felt it wouldn't be right for her:

'My mum had always thought that uni was a waste of time and was stupid, because people were pushed into it and there's so much debt and a lot of people did degrees and didn't get a job, so she didn't really want me...she's always said, make up your own mind, but she did guide me not to go to uni, and so that's why I kept deferring and changing my mind.' (25-39, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

Expectations could also be set by others such as teachers and employers, and these were often perceived as barriers or challenges which individuals were spurred on to overcome. For example, one interviewee who was deciding on an area of work to pursue was repeatedly told that she was not clever enough:

'Anyway, I wanted to go into nursing. I started ringing around. They said "no, you haven't got enough O-levels". I just thought, God, I'm 25. And it was the time when things had started to change in terms of different entries into professions. And they've got other… nurses with five O-levels. So I thought, sod you. I'll be a social worker then. So that's what I thought I would do … so I did my Access to Higher Education and applied for social work.' (40+, Level 4 or above, employed)

4.3.4   Family tradition

For many these expectations were rooted in family tradition, such as following in the footsteps of other family members, and this could be felt as a responsibility. It could also involve following in the footsteps of friends, particularly with study and learning choices. There were examples of interviewees wanting to follow in the footsteps of a family member. For example, one young student noted:

> *'The medical route was probably influenced by my mother being a psychologist and my family being quite scientific. The other route was influential people that I had in my life at that time did land management. I'm from quite a rural community, my dad also managed a country park and my grandparents were farmers.'* (18-24, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

Another male noted: *'Since I left school I wanted to be a mechanical engineer. My dad used to be that so I enjoyed doing a lot of the hands on work with my dad.'* (25-39, unknown qualifications, unemployed, inactive). Others spoke of the responsibility of family tradition:

> *'…because I came from a highly educated family, my mother had a PhD and my father felt that I needed to at least have a university degree, not that I felt pressured from them, it was just there, you know it was something you felt, it was a responsibility I felt I had at that time… in my family nobody was business oriented, everybody was professors and things, so it [having business skills] wasn't something that was natural to me'* (40+, Level 4 and above, employed)

Sometimes the influence was more subtle, providing an opportunity to view a particular occupation in a positive light*: 'at that time as well I was going out with a teacher she'd just qualified and everything, and I thought this is something good that I can do.'* (40+, Level 4 or above, employed).

One interviewee however was consciously deterred from following the same career path as a family member:

> *'I think that's because when I was a kid, my dad was a nurse in the navy. So I'd had this thing in my head that I really wanted to be a nurse. My dad always put me off. He said "you don't want to be a nurse, you want to be doctor". And I was never going to be a doctor because, obviously, of my terrible O-levels, but secretly harboured… still think, oh, I want to be a doctor. Anyway, I wanted to go into nursing.'* (40+, Level 4 or above, employed)

4.3.5   Wider social norms

Expectations could also reflect wider social norms, and be perceived as doing what was normal, acceptable or the right thing to do. For example, one young student talked about how she had been influenced by wider expectations (beyond those of her family) in choosing her university degree, and another interviewee who left school at 16 to become a secretary spoke of how her mother's experience had been an influence coupled with the her teacher's gendered stereotypes:

> *'I perceived that physiotherapy would be more academically acceptable than doing a land management degree, and that was influenced by what my peers*

were doing and my brother doing really well and having gone to Cambridge. So I was definitely influenced by that, which is a shame because this is academically demanding… I'm 18 months younger than my brother and he's annoyingly clever. He whizzed through all of his A-levels and went to Cambridge. He went and did natural sciences, so I think there was an element of trying to keep up with him and actually we're chalk and cheese so what he has, I lack and vice versa. So there was probably no reason to compete, but you don't realise that when you're a teenager.' (18-24, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

'When I was doing physics at school I knew that that was my love and that's when my physics teacher told my parents, what the hell made your daughter want to take up physics. Girls don't do physics. I ended up doing my O-level but I didn't like being in his class because I was the only girl and he made it quite clear that girls don't do that sort of thing. And I think you might know earlier on but it almost gets knocked out of you because all these other suggestions are going: well, there's a lovely secretarial college, all the girls go there. Why don't you go there? Oh, all right, then… I left school and went to college for two years to train as a secretary. I thought I'd better do something girly. This is back a few years ago as you can well imagine …my mum left school at 14, no qualifications and I suppose we were guided a lot by her. And to her getting a secretarial job was just like the bees' knees.' (40+, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

4.3.6   Dangers of taking over

Families and friends could also go a stage further than encouraging and supporting decisions or setting frameworks within which to make decisions to actually assisting the individual in making a decision (see section 5.3 for further discussion of this decision-making style). When this role had been given by the interviewee, the support provided could be viewed as helpful. One interviewee with a disability spoke about how important their families had been in helping with decisions to get back into learning:

'…my sisters were quite adamant that you can't just stay at home: your friends are going back to school and doing things. And they put me on the course... the way they saw it, before I could do anything in life I had to do my English and maths.' (40+, below Level 2 (including no qualifications), unemployed/inactive)

In some cases, however, the interviewees felt that decisions had been taken completely out of their hands, often unwillingly, and that they were in danger of losing sight of their own goals or ambitions.

- For example, one older interviewee spoke about the controlling influence of his mother: *'My mum was great. She was lovely, she was fantastic. Very loving, very caring, but you couldn't really discuss it. You're 16, you get a job, full stop. There wasn't any excuses. So the communication... it was very autocratic. It was, you will do as you're told. That's the guidelines, that's what you're going to do and that's how you're going to do it. And if you don't do it, then don't come running to me'* (40+, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive).

- And a female interviewee with disability spoke of the controlling influence of a teacher *'I didn't really have any good advice at school, apart from the tutor deciding everything for*

me, so that went really wrong. I think, she meant well, but she just, kind of, took over and it was all the wrong thing for me.' (40+, Level 2 or 3, employed).

4.3.7   Culture of the workplace

A few interviewees talked about the culture of their workplace and how this had influenced them. For example, one interviewee working as a secretary in academia had been inspired by her colleagues who were not at all as she had expected, and how she felt she could do more:

'I worked in that job [secretary to academics] for about three years then I moved to [another University] and I worked there for about three years as a secretary again. And because of where I was working it actually sowed a seed, I know, for what I did later. Because I worked with a psychologist and I used to type all his work up for that three years. And he used to talk during meals about psychology and that really, really fascinated me. I didn't realise what an influence it would have on me....I expected ivory towers, posh people and what I got was a load of people who had a can do attitude. And it was a case of, oh, I don't know how to do that. How do I do it? But none of them were frightened to say I didn't know. They would all be like: oh, I don't know about that. Could you tell me? You never, ever heard somebody try to bluff... and I realised that all the people there, the reason they were so good was they were inquisitive and they asked. And he did have a big influence on me; I thought the reason you're here is because you're quite happy to say, I don't know, show me and no embarrassment whatsoever. Whereas I think I was brought up, if you didn't know things you just kept quiet and didn't ask. Instead of saying "hey, show me, show me, I want to know".' (40+, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

4.4 Conclusions

Individuals' career decision-making takes place within a wider context. Individuals consider all of the individual factors outlined in Chapter 3, but to make effective and context specific decisions they must relate how they are feeling about life and themselves, their career, work and learning identity and goals and their education, skills and qualifications, as well as their opportunities and constraints associated with their personal circumstances to the labour market and society more generally. Sources of information and support may be able to provide individuals with information and advice to help them to make these reflections and assessments, and labour market information has a key role. Generally, there was a low level of awareness of formal career support, and respondents had often had career advice from professionals and staff delivering other (related) services, such as social workers. The delivery implications of these findings are discussed in section 7.3.

Sources of information and support offer individuals short-cuts in career decision-making, a feature that the literature from behavioural science found to be common in decision-making (Chapter 2). There were examples of individuals choosing an occupation on the advice of a friend or family member rather than exploring the potentially many occupations that could have been of interest to them. Careers tools, such as the Skills Health Check available online from the NCS, also offer individuals a way to process work and learning information and to find out what is relevant and interesting to them. In general, however,

individuals had a relatively narrow field of vision in terms of the career options they were considering, despite interacting with several external sources of advice and support. The limited focus of many people making career decisions is further explored in the delivery implications of the research in section 7.3.

How individuals reflect on the external conditions and the extent to which they are able to look widely at their work and learning options influences their approach to career decision-making; this is explored in Chapter 5. It is clear that each interviewee had very different circumstances, opportunities and constraints, therefore requiring personalised and tailored career support where appropriate. This was not always their experience and therefore this is discussed further in the delivery implications of the research in section 7.3.

5 Career decision-making

The factors affecting career decision-making were outlined in Chapters 3 and 4. These were influences on the decision itself, but also affected the decision-making style an individual uses and therefore how they make career decisions. In this chapter we discuss the process of career decision-making. First we present an overview of career decision-making, including the career questions individuals were trying to answer. We then explore the triggers and causes of career decisions, before analysing the data relating to career decision-making approaches or styles and the process by which individuals make career decisions.

Key findings

How interviewees made a career decision was a complex and personal process and one which interviewees could not necessarily explain. There were a number of different things influencing and affecting interviewees at any one time. Respondents tended to articulate what they were considering or weighing up, rather than to describe the cognitive process by which they reached decisions.

Some career 'decisions' were exploratory and without a clear time boundary and others were more concrete in their nature. Examples of the types of career, work and learning decisions interviewees were making included: should I leave a job I am not enjoying? How do I continue to feel like I am progressing in work?

There were varied reasons for making a career decision which could come out of the blue, such as bereavement, or could build up over time, such as feeling unsupported and under pressure at work. There were critical points in the life course when interviewees were making career decisions, including the period after leaving school, college or university, a few years into working life, times when respondents were starting a family, and a few years prior to retirement when respondents of this age reported refocusing on what they wanted from the remainder of their working life.

The factors influencing decision-making frame the context in which a career decision is taken, but also affect how the individual comes to a decision. Active interviewees tended to reflect on, maintain and develop the influences on their career decision-making that are within their control, whereas passive interviewees were more constrained in these terms.

The evidence suggested five distinct approaches to career decision-making evident among interviewees: strategic; exploratory; opportunistic; impulsive and passive. Some individuals used the same decision-making styles over time, but others reflected on the outcomes of past career decisions made using a particular style and were actively trying to deploy a different career decision-making style in future.

When we map our career decision-making styles to the careers customer segmentation model used by the National Careers Service, we find there are decision-making styles most likely to be adopted by people within each customer segment. We observed some

---

variety in decision-making styles between people with similar characteristics and constraints, so this mapping is broad-brush, while in reality the situation would be more nuanced and individuals in any of the segments could adopt any of the decision-making styles. When we compare our findings to the MINDSPACE framework we see many of the factors explained by the framework at play in adult career decision-making.

5.1 Overview of career decision-making

This chapter presents the findings about how interviewees reported they made career decisions. Before we present the evidence in detail, there are some general considerations that are important when reflecting upon and interpreting the data. First, our interviewees did not necessarily see their 'journey' as a career. Instead they tended to view it as a series of interlinked episodes or experiences. Sometimes these were, as expected in this study, episodes of work or learning, experienced positively or negatively. For others, as we will see below, the really important events affecting career choices were not necessarily work or learning related at all. The work and learning stories of participants were typically told in a narrative where it was important to understand past experience in order to understand the current situation and work and learning options. Experience of work and learning was just one part of respondents' lives, with personal circumstances frequently impacting upon the scope of their career decision-making.

Some individuals were fairly clear about their life and career narratives, had reflected on what had affected them at various times and could articulate how their career ideas were evolving over time. Others found it quite difficult to tell any coherent narrative of their lives, often missing out really key events or influences and looping back to them later in the conversation.

It was common for interviewees to view their work and learning differently at different points in time. For example, at certain points, some interviewees did not identify themselves as a learner, whereas over several years, they came to reconsider their sense of self, and what they wanted from work and developed a self-confidence and belief that they could participate in learning. For others, periods of their working lives were dominated by the needs of others, such as children, and in some cases supporting the careers of their partners. Over the course of interviewees' lives, it is clear that they have felt differently about themselves, their career goals, and the skills and qualifications they have to offer at various points in time. This affects the career options they have, and also how they prioritise the various factors that influence whether they have a career decision to make, and also the outcome of any decision.

The focus of this research is career decision-making. However, how individuals made a career decision was not necessarily something that interviewees could easily explain. They tended to recount a series of events and influences, underpinned by how they were feeling and the circumstances at different points in their lives. Overall, they described career decision-making as a personal and complex process, with a number of different things influencing and affecting interviewees at any one point in time.

It is clear that interviewees quite often did not feel in control of their career decision-making. Sometimes their circumstances changed and they felt forced to make choices and

decisions that they had not necessarily planned for or anticipated. There were also examples of interviewees who felt that career decisions had been made for them. In several cases, individuals reflected on how very clear expectations from their parents effectively determined whether or not they would continue past post-compulsory schooling. Those who had left school at 16 sometimes said this was simply expected in their family and/or community, but also often coupled this with the financial necessity of bringing money into the family home by entering work as soon as possible.

There were also examples of interviewees who found the process of making a career decision and deciding what action to take overwhelming. This was particularly the case for individuals whose driver for making a career change was initiated as a result of personal reflection, and those who wanted to do something different, but were not sure what they were suited to.

While there are some common themes in what interviewees were deciding about their career, work and learning, each decision was embedded in differing personal, labour market and societal circumstances and influences. Some 'decisions' were exploratory and without a clear time boundary, others were more concrete, and in some cases time-bounded. Each decision was different. Decisions could be binary, with an individual deciding 'yes' or 'no' (for example whether to leave a job or stay), but more typically, it was a complicated choice with a number of different (sometimes limitless) permutations to choose from, and often with change coming about as the result of a series of decisions. Some interviewees tended to view their career, work and learning in the short-term, and this framed their decisions. Other interviewees had a longer-term outlook and perspective in which they made career decisions.

In this report, reflecting the experience of interviewees, we consider career decisions to include drawing together thoughts and plans on the one hand, and clear action, such as leaving a job on the other. Many respondents were quite closed in the fields they were considering for the career decisions. It was typical for respondents to consider one or two options that might be appropriate, and deciding whether an option was what they wanted. Examples of the types of career, work and learning decisions interviewees were making, or had made in the past included:

- Should I leave a job I am not enjoying?

- How can I do the work I enjoy (and does not pay well) and still pay my bills?

- How can I work and afford childcare?

- What work is suitable for me now that I have a health condition?

- Now I have moved to a new area, how do I find work?

- What programme of study would fit with my work and other responsibilities?

- How can I take time to study or pay study fees when I need all my earnings just to live?

- Should I apply for job A? Am I a good match for the advertised person specification?

- How do I develop my skills and stay employable during a period out of work?

- What work will pay the bills while I have some fun/travel?

- What kind of work can I do which will give me good benefits, such as a pension?

- How can I transfer my skills and experience to another type of work or sector? What might that work be?

- What work am I suited to or would fit with what I want from work?

- How do I continue to feel like I am progressing in work and stop this feeling of being on a plateau?

- Should I retrain? What would the work prospects be? Can I afford to return to learning?

- I know I want to spend the rest of my working life doing something I will really enjoy or feel worthwhile, but how do I know what that might be?

- When should I retire?

Interviewees' career questions tended to be framed very personally and based on their personal circumstances. Interviewees did not tend to have questions about their local labour market or explicitly seek to find out about the make-up of and likely changes in their local labour market as part of their career decision-making.

5.2 Reasons for making a career decision

The initial momentum to make a career decision could be internal or external to the individual and the primary cause could be any of the factors outlined in Chapters 3 and 4. Among our respondents, external influences, such as personal stress at work and family circumstances, were more common precipitators of a career decision than internal drivers. What altered the equilibrium of an individual's life could occur slowly and incrementally over a considerable period of time, or come out of the blue. Some changes required a rapid response and decision, whereas others were not time-bound. In many instances it was more than one thing that led to a point of decision; for example, not enjoying a job, in combination with a family or personal issue. The following example highlights one case where several work, learning, and personal issues combined, creating momentum to make a career decision:

> *'I was doing this OU course at the same time. I think that was at the same time as that, and I didn't make my target [at work] for that, and I failed my course, and I broke up with [boyfriend], and all at the same time, and our house contract came to an end, and we were going to move to a new house, but then we didn't for some reason…I ended up in this massive amount of failure, amongst all*

three things, and with no house as well, trying to finish my course with no internet, even though it was an internet course, and it was an absolute nightmare. I basically had a massive breakdown, but to be honest, the job didn't come crucially... it came to a fairly bad end. He gave my job to one of the other people that I had employed, this guy who was much better at the job…This is all going wrong, I was very, very low, and then I just decided to go to Glastonbury Festival. I actually missed my last week of work, I called in sick and just went to Glastonbury.' (25-39, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

In general, these career decision-making periods in interviewees' lives were when their views and choices about work and learning were thrown up in the air, and their previously held, work, learning and life priorities and the course of their career could fundamentally change. Although respondents frequently talked about chance, other than changes in family circumstances, there were not that many decisions precipitated by chance events.

The remainder of this section reports on respondents' reasons for making a career decision.

Reflecting on career, work and learning identity and goals

There were many examples of several work-related causes of reflection culminating in pressure to make a career decision. As individuals reflected on their work situation over time, they could decide that they were employed in the wrong job, or that they were not working in the type of job that fitted with their work, learning and career values. These reflections could be driven by external factors or internal ones as individuals questioned and responded to their current situation and related changes to their personal beliefs. Shifts could come about as people questioned their career values and what they wanted from work. These periods of reflection could lead to a decision timeframe that was less immediate than those caused by external influences.

Periods of reflection on career identity could equally be the result of a poor work experience, such as workplace bullying, stress at work, feeling unsupported and under pressure at work, or a negative change in work-life balance. Interviewees tended to have been experiencing the underlying workplace issues for a number of months or even years before making a decision, but when they did decide, the decision was often acted upon quickly and even impulsively with little forethought given to the direction their working lives might take next.

In the first example below, one respondent describes how following changes to the management structure at his workplace and his job role he found himself in a stressful situation at work, which he reported was the final straw in him handing in his notice. In the second example, the respondent describes shouldering responsibility without feeling that they had the workplace systems, training or structures in place to provide adequate support:

'I was working an evening event [at name of employer]… and the equipment wasn't working and he [manager] wasn't there to get any help and I was being shouted at by whoever was running the event, and I thought… it's just quite a difficult situation, and I'd been thinking about leaving anyway because, I guess, the whole work-life balance thing.' (25-39, Level 4 or above, employed)

'You're instilled with a massive sense of responsibility and duty of care but are not equipped with any of the tools to actually act on those, and so I just thought – do you know what? I don't want to do this anymore so I went home after that day and I applied for this MSc, and it was the push I needed because I thought I don't want this to happen again…I don't like the pressure of responsibility without being equipped with the tools with which to act on those pressures. So it was really sad and I just thought I don't want to do this anymore.' (18-24, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

Another respondent described the time when after working in a job for three years she reached a point where she was unable to cope with the bullying she was experiencing from colleagues:

'The only reason I left is I was being bullied. I just couldn't bear it; I just walked out. I gave them my notice and said "I'm going". I had no job to go to. ….And because I walked out of my job because I was being bullied it was a case of a chance to do something.' (40+, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

Stress induced decisions nearly always led to respondents resigning their job, but in several cases also led to a period of physical or mental illness.

In contrast to decisions driven by stress at work, several interviewees described how declining interest and satisfaction with the current content of their work led to shifts in their career identity or career values and to them questioning how they saw their future career. These feelings became the catalyst for making career decisions and tended to gradually appear over time as individuals reflected on the values of their work, the type of work they wanted to do in the future and their career goals and priorities, as the following examples illustrate:

'I just found it very empty and very vacuous [working in marketing]. So I do remember sitting in meetings talking about soap powder. I'm thinking, oh, my God. Really? Soap powder? But then, having said, "yes, great! It's soap powder!" And I don't know whether it was just this thing. It just didn't sit with me very well.' (40+, Level 4 or above, employed)

'It came to a point where I'd realised, this [working in a burger restaurant] isn't for me. I'm still quite young, I feel like I'm wasting my life.' (25-39, Level 2 or 3, employed)

'It just starts building up in the shoulders, building up, building up and then all of a sudden you start crashing down or whatever, or it will suddenly hit you…I don't want to be here [working in the transport sector]. I've not been happy doing the seven years with you guys and I'm going to be even unhappier or worse in ten, 20 years time. So I thought you know what; I'm going to change.' (25-39, unknown qualifications, unemployed, inactive)

While many of these periods of reflection seemed to be specific to the person, their situation and how they experienced it, and could occur at any point in time, some older interviewees with about 10 years left in their working lives discussed that having a smaller working window had led them to reflect on their current situation and to consider their career path for the remainder of their working life. Having a more tangibly finite period of working life left seemed to become a good point of focus for reflection on career, work and

learning goals and identity, as one respondent described:

> *'I think because I haven't really taken it in as a whole until recently, because there are so many things. You know you've only got a finite number when you get to my age; you've only got a finite number of years left in work.'* (40+, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

Changes to personal circumstances

Changes to personal circumstances could create a career turning point. Among the interviewees, these changes were varied and included changes concerned with children, moving area, bereavement, health, financial crisis and relationship breakdown. These are discussed in turn below.

For interviewees with children, particularly the women in our sample, starting a family caused them to reassess their career goals, and the balance they wanted between work and family life. Interviewees with children balanced work and family responsibilities: some, on balance, prioritised work; others prioritised providing childcare and looking after the home. In the cases where interviewees were working parents, a breakdown in any element of how they managed their childcare around their working patterns could create the need to make a career decision and cause them to reassess their priorities. For example, one single parent who was working in catering and hospitality, described how one night the evening care for her son fell through:

> *'I came home from work one night and it was half past one in the morning…my son had disappeared, didn't know where he was…but from that part on I thought, no, my son's got [to] come first. So I had a word with the restaurant and said "I won't be staying".'* (40+, Level 2 or 3, employed)

As children grew older and required less parental care, some interviewees reflected that this was a time when they were able to re-prioritise or re-engage with work or learning.

Changes to other personal circumstances such as moving to the UK from abroad, or moving area within the UK could also create a career decision point, as one respondent described:

> *'I had a relationship with someone for a long time and he was leaving for the United States to finish some studies and I decided it was an idea for me as well.'* (40+, Level 4 and above, employed)

In several cases, dissatisfaction with current work was a strong factor in deciding whether to follow a partner to a different location or country in the relatively early stages of a relationship.

Other examples of changes in housing creating a decision point included one respondent who was made homeless while still young, following a family argument. Her work and learning choices were then focused on the need to find safe accommodation and income to cover living costs. On one occasion this meant giving up a job in order to take up the offer of suitable accommodation in another location.

There were several examples of interviewees reassessing their work and learning as a

consequence of bereavement. The examples below include one where bereavement led a then social worker to want to change occupation, and another where the individual was happy to continue with their work as a support worker, but needed to stop supporting one particular client and, therefore, to find another position:

'It was quite harrowing, the work, and I had a client that died; was killed. It was quite difficult. And, obviously, I'd lost a baby at that time as well, so I had a baby and he died. So I decided not to go back to that team and I decided to do something completely different.' (40+, Level 4 or above, employed)

'I had two jobs, one of them finished a couple of weeks ago because my Dad died last year and this woman was too much like my Dad and I couldn't deal with it, they were so similar, it's too soon. I've got another interview for another support work on Tuesday.' (25-39, Level 4 or above, employed)

There were examples of often sudden and unexpected changes to interviewees' mental and physical health requiring them to make career decisions. In some instances, health conditions were felt to have been brought on by work, and interviewees then felt they needed to work in a different sector or occupation. For example:

'When I was at [name of pub]…it was getting really stressful and I ended up collapsing in the kitchen and I was on heart monitor and all sorts of stuff for a week in hospital, so I thought, something's not right, I could do without the pressure.' (25-39, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive)

'I went to work one day. I didn't even know what was going on. I really didn't know that everything... it was a really busy time. Everything was great, and I just started crying. I've got three secretaries, I've got a staff of 30, and I'm sat in my office in this big tower block and I just started breaking down. And I didn't know why I couldn't stop crying. And I didn't understand. I thought I was going mad. I actually thought I was going crazy. Why can't I stop crying? And I think you can use all the clichés in the world... the straw that breaks the camel's back. I was just like a sponge. I was so soaked with everything, it just broke me.' (40+, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive)

In other cases, health conditions could change long-held career ambitions, such as one respondent who was no longer able to apply to the army after being injured in an accident.

A relationship breakdown also put several interviewees in a position where they needed to make a career decision. There were examples including:

- A divorce which meant that a housewife had to start work in order to support her children

- A father whose wife had post natal depression and left him as the sole carer for their young son who found he could not afford childcare and to continue to work in his previous employment

- A woman who recently moved from North West England to North East England to escape her abusive ex-husband. She gave up her previous employment and at the time of the interview was trying to find work. She said: *'I just had to leave, I had to get away. I*

didn't want to be anywhere near him or the town.' (40+, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive).

Other turning points among interviewees included two examples where after many years, individual's recognised they had issues with alcohol/drugs dependency, sought help with their addiction issues and positively re-engaged with work and learning. One of these interviewees had been involved in selling drugs and described how seeing a friend, who was also a drug dealer, being caught and imprisoned made him reconsider his career path:

> *'A friend of mine got caught, and he got put away. And the realisation of a six-by-six in a prison... in a very small cell, with people that I really didn't like and didn't want to be with, and a criminal record, made me just one day just... no.'* (40+, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive)

While finance was a factor in many career decisions, there were also examples where money (or lack of it) forced the decision itself. For example, some interviewees had not completed a programme of learning because part way through they ran short of money and realised they needed to prioritise work. Another interviewee who was self-employed and who had debt problems, discussed how she was in a position where she was unable to pay her rent and this had forced her to assess her work and how she might earn a living wage.

Critical points in the life course

Critical points in the life journey of respondents when they were considering and making decisions about their careers included the time interviewees left school or college and after a number of years in work.

Many interviewees, particularly, but not exclusively. those who left school with few or no qualifications or who did not continue beyond compulsory schooling, discussed how the choices they had made at a young age had negatively affected their later options. Some interviewees wished they had stayed on at school or college, and others that had stayed in education reflected that they had made poorly informed choices, such as making A-level subject decisions that restricted their future learning options in a way that they had not foreseen or been informed might happen at the time.

Once on a particular pathway, some interviewees felt that changing direction was not possible. For example, one respondent who did not continue to sixth form, but now wished they had said*:*

> *'If I'd learned more I could have done more things…I should've stuck in and listened because you only have one chance don't you?'* (18-24, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive)

By contrast, other interviewees who felt they needed (further) qualifications to progress in work did not subscribe to this 'one chance' philosophy and had made decisions to undertake, often significant, periods of learning (see section 3.4). These contrasting examples illustrate how the influences on career decision-making and personal views and attitudes can affect whether or not an individual is likely to make an internally driven career decision.

Some respondents found themselves reflecting on their careers after they had left education and been in work for a few years. Being in the working environment had enabled them to see what working was like and for those who found themselves in jobs they found unsatisfactory, this could be a critical point at which they sought to re-engage with learning or tried to forge a different career path.

Learning

Learning could be a positive or negative force for making a decision. Some interviewees described critical points in their career as a result of learning, or being in an environment where learning and knowledge development was valued. There were several examples of interviewees starting a programme of learning which enabled them to experience different things and to develop knowledge and interest in occupations and areas that they previously had known little or nothing about. For example: *'I've actually got my PTLLS* [Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector] *accreditation now, which is the one thing that has kick-started me off to think that this might be something that I'd like to pursue'* (25-39, Level 2 or 3, employed). Another respondent had started learning with a basic skills course and now had a place on a degree programme.

For one respondent who worked in academia as a secretary, being in a working environment where knowledge and learning was valued, developed a belief in her that learning was important and also was something in which she could participate. Some years later she returned to learning and studied to PhD level. Now faced with another career change, she has been reflecting again on her confidence in going back to learning which is still positive many years after that early experience of working as an academic secretary.

Other respondents in a learning environment had felt part way through their programme that they were doing the wrong course, or that they were in the wrong environment and so came to a decision to leave their course.

Labour market and learning opportunities and constraints

The recent recession had changed the working lives of several of our interviewees, and required them to make career decisions. The labour market is also a contextual constraint on decision-making (see section 4.1.1). There were several examples of respondents' posts being made redundant, such as this respondent who was working in architecture:

> *'At the beginning of 2009 there were redundancies and I was really shocked and appalled actually to be selected for redundancy that I'd got made redundant. I was really peeved at that, I'd gone through every avenue that I could to fight redundancy, and I don't know if it was because of that or not, but I got made redundant anyway.'* (40+, Level 4 or above, employed)

Other redundancies had come about because of the work performance of individuals, as this example illustrates:

> *'I was sacked for gross misconduct. I was so upset I was just having a really bad day, and one day someone was really rude on the phone… and I said "are you effing deaf?" And I lost my job.'* (18-24, Level 2 or 3, employed)

Sources of information and support

Receiving a piece of careers information or advice, which they had not actively sought, spurred some interviewees to make a career decision. Among our respondents, there was only one decision directly supported by an assessment of aptitude; a woman who had studied IT as part of her undergraduate studies and decided not to pursue this as her field of work. Following a successful application to the Civil Service, the recruiter there discussed her aptitude tests and she came round to seeing it as the type of work she could be suited to. She has since been working in the field for the last 30 years. She described:

> *'No, it hadn't occurred to me to go into IT at all, and that's what I've done ever since. So that was just a happy chance, really, that they looked at my scores, and obviously they saw as my aptitudes, and suggested it, because I thought I didn't like it, from university.'* (40+, Level 4 or above, employed)

A much more common experience was of individuals offering information or advice much more informally; this often led to interviewees being aware of particular types of work. In some cases, those in support roles in relation to the interviewees (social care or health workers for example) were instrumental in getting interviewees to make career decisions (see section 4.2.5).

Social and systemic opportunities and constraints

How others viewed interviewees could affect their career decisions (see section 4.2). There were a small number of examples where interviewees described changes in other people's attitudes to them, and how this opened up their career opportunities. For example, one respondent who worked for a marketing company in the 1980s described how she wanted to move from secretarial work into the marketing side of the business but had met with some resistance. However, suddenly her boss's view of her and what she might be capable of changed and she was able to progress at work:

> *'The boss' boss – the big boss – went on a flight to New York. He saw that film Working Girl with Melanie Griffiths where she plays a secretary and then she ends up being the CE [Chief Executive]. Saw that film, came back; he said, "oh, let's give [name of respondent] a chance". I said, "oh, my God, how random and how arbitrary". So actually, if he hadn't seen that film, I'd probably still… And it makes me… that made me angry because I thought, God, my whole career was just on the whim of him happening to watch that film on a bloody flight to New York.'* (40+, Level 4 or above, employed)

5.3 Career decision-making styles

Chapters 3 and 4 have set out the evidence relating to what respondents were considering when making career decisions. This section presents the evidence relating specifically to: How do I approach a career decision?

The influencing factors described in earlier sections of the report not only frame the context in which a decision is taken, but in many cases affect how an individual comes to a career decision. Career decision-making is a complex and iterative process, with small changes to the factors that affect work and learning causing individuals to reassess their

priorities and constraints. Having made one decision, for example, this may open up other possibilities and lead an individual to reflect differently on previous 'knowns'. There needs to be a driver that alters the balance of an individual's work or learning life, in order for them to reach a career decision-making point. The drivers bringing interviewees to a decision point were discussed in section 5.2.

The influence of factors, including health, access to finance, and personal circumstances for example, may rule out some work and learning options, or make them so difficult as to be practical. The factors that affect career decision-making need to be understood so an individual can use a strategic and informed decision-making process. Without knowledge or understanding of the factors that influence career decisions, the decision an individual makes and the action they take could be different, whatever decision-making process they use. Similarly, the sections above have provided a number of examples where the context of an individual's life has changed and altered their career opportunities. As an individual's priorities change and they give more weight to different influences on their career, although they may use the same approach to decision-making, the outcome of the decision may be different.

Interviewees did not tend to disentangle the things they were considering and reflecting upon when making a career decision from how they made a career decision. However, there were some differences between how individuals responded to the many influences on their career, work and learning and how these factors informed (or otherwise) their career decision-making. Even where the decision-making process was considered and strategic, individuals were weighing up factors and making the decisions based on their circumstances, opportunities and constraints, these were not necessarily what economists would term 'rational' decisions. Respondents were displaying what Hodkinson terms 'pragmatic rationality' in their career decision-making (Hodkinson, 2008) – making the best of the options available to them.

The career decision-making style an individual uses is likely to reflect the extent to which they are able to articulate and assess their career, work and learning identity and goals, understand and reflect on the skills they have/ can offer and how they match to current labour market opportunities, and their psychological orientation.

The evidence suggests five distinct approaches to making a career decision were evident among our interviewees: strategic, exploratory, opportunistic, impulsive and passive. The different decision-making styles deployed by interviewees relate to the degree to which they consciously look at and explore wider options for work and learning and the degree to which they are looking ahead and reflecting on their own interests and preferences. Active interviewees tended to reflect on, maintain and develop some or all of the influences within their primary control (career, work and learning identity and goals; education, skills and qualifications; psychological orientation; sources of information and support), whereas passive interviewees were more constrained in these terms. Within each decision-making style there was a spectrum of the extent to which interviewees consciously looked outwards, denoted by the dotted lines in Figure 5.1.

Both personal and labour market constraints tend to drive individuals leftward on Figure 5.1 into considering narrower and close at hand labour market or learning options. Social

and psychological constraints as well as personal circumstances tend to negatively affect the extent to which individuals believe they can exercise control over their lives. Constraints seem to make it more difficult for individuals to have a long-term horizon with regards to decision-making.

Figure 5.1: Overview of career decision-making styles
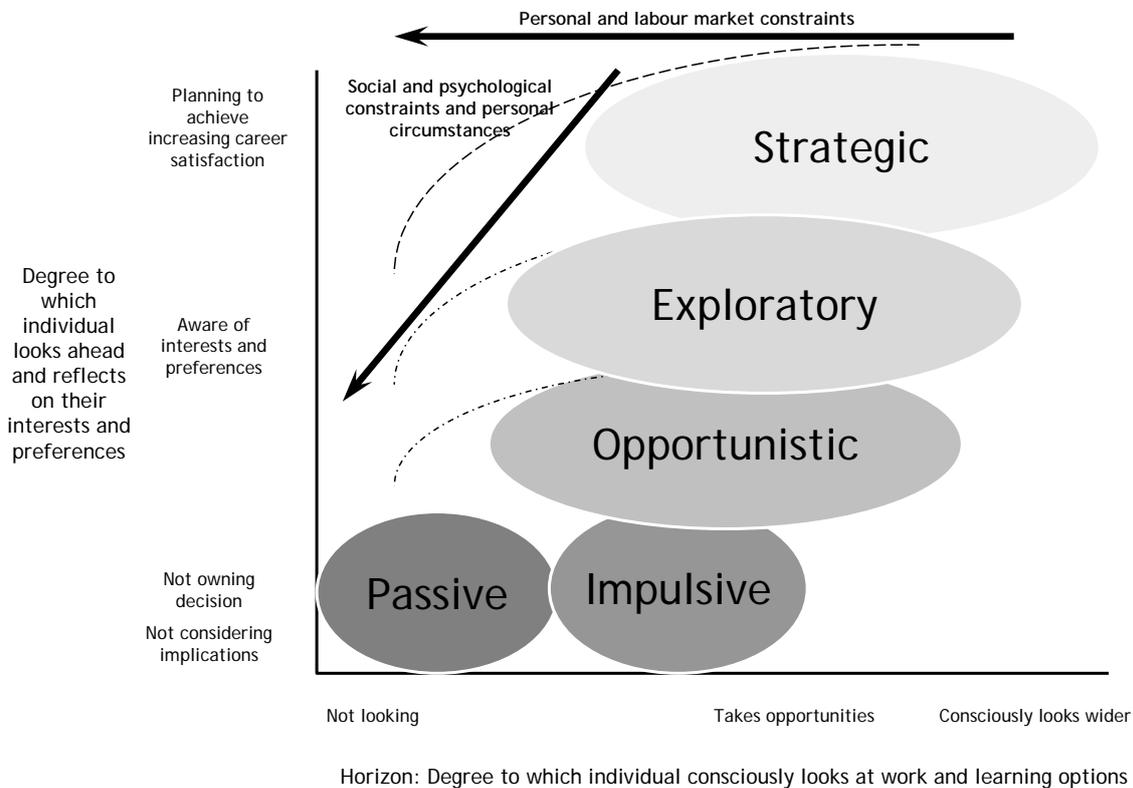
Source: IES, 2013

The key characteristics of each decision-making style are summarised in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Overview of the characteristics of decision-making styles

Decision-making style	Characteristics of the decision-making style
Strategic	Reflective about self; systematic; seeking out information and consulting others; deliberate weighing up of factors influencing the decision.
Exploratory	Reflective after periods of experience; testing ideas through experience; evaluating how they feel about experiences; can be pro-active in looking for opportunities.
Opportunistic	Reactive; responding to opportunities; often taking opportunities pointed out by others
Impulsive	Emotional; instinctive; often taking very quick decisions with little or no thought about real options or the consequences of decision.
Passive	Laid back; drifting; reacting to choices presented; strongly influenced by others in their choices.

Source: IES, 2013

Some individuals used the same decision-making process consistently over time, but there were also examples of people reflecting on how they made decisions (particularly if the

outcomes of those decisions had not been how they would have wished) and trying different approaches.

Each of the career decision-making approaches is discussed in turn below. Discussion about whether any decision-making style is necessarily 'better' than another is contained in section 7.1.

Strategic career-decision-making

Some interviewees described how their career decision-making approach was considered, systematic and strategic. Individuals approaching career decisions in this way tended to devote time for self-reflection and to aide this process by using tools such as lists, writing down the pros and cons to a particular decision, weighing up what was most important to them at any one time, seeking out information and consulting others, as well as consciously seeking out information to fill gaps in their understanding and what they needed to know before being able to make a decision. This group were active at finding work and learning options, deliberate in weighing up the options and were realistic about their opportunities and constraints. That is not to say that the decisions they reached were the result of a 'rational' decision-making process. Strategic decision-makers were more than this: they were practical, and emotional, as well as cognitive.

When making decisions, interviewees were considering many of the factors identified as those influencing the decision-making process earlier in this chapter. For some, there were specific influences they would not compromise on, and others were working within constraints, such as making choices that would enable them to also meet their financial responsibilities. The balance of the factors that influenced the career decision-making process and their relative priorities varied between individuals. Interviewees using this decision-making style could be heavily constrained, which limited the career options they considered and therefore their career outcomes, rather than affected their process of decision-making. There were examples of interviewees weighing up their constraints and opportunities and opting to work in an unsatisfactory job because it provided the income they needed to be able to pursue creative or voluntary work in a field they enjoyed.

The following quotes illustrate how some interviewees described their strategic approach to career decision-making:

> *'I do try to sound out everything so look at the pros and the cons. I wouldn't say I'm very impulsive in terms of my choices. I like to consider all my options when it comes to making a decision that could potentially affect the rest of my future.'* (25-39, Level 4 and above, unemployed/inactive)

> *'I have to weigh up the pros and cons. I have to make sure it's quite relevant, it's pragmatic, that it's not going to be something that, as I mentioned, I want it to be something that I can afford. So, if it's a well paid job, I can afford to pay rent and I can pay bills and everything and it's close to home for my mum.'* (18-24, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive)

> *'I suppose, at each of these points where I've had this big life changes, I've had a massive brainstorming session for days with loads of information, and so many different options and I literally have to go through them all. What can I do*

next? How can I go, what can I do? My caravan was wall to wall with options.'
(25-39, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

The example below is from a computer programmer who described applying a programming approach to analysing his skills set, thus already applying his analytic skills to other areas of his life.

'I'm pretty good at breaking down problems, so I looked at this problem... I will list all my skills, my competencies. I was looking at my roles, the network manager and resident officer role, also that IT experience I gained during college. I broke it down and put it into what skills I'd demonstrated through my work that I was doing. I put down what I actually did, then I broke it down even further. What skills did I learn from my job, that was that, and then I started to get a list of competencies.' (18-24, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

The effectiveness of this decision-making approach will be determined by how sufficiently an individual understands their situation and their ability to apply and relate their situation to their career question and the factors influencing their career decision. While the process itself may be effective, the quality of the decision will be determined by the inputs and understanding that go into the decision process. For example, an individual's ability to access information and to budget for the costs of undertaking learning prior to signing up to a programme of study (see section 4.1.2).

Some interviewees who were strategic in their career decision-making discussed how they liked to have several options or paths available in case their preferred course of action was not possible. Having more than one planned, possible pathway, and in some cases a fallback career path, helped to give interviewees a sense of control and resilience in the face to changing circumstances. The examples below describe the fall-back plans of two interviewees.

The first example is how someone in their forties with two children might manage financially as she starts on a full-time university programme. She describes if she struggled financially how she would change her programme to part-time and to look for work rather than leave the course:

'I'd go part-time, but I don't want to because I want to be able to do three years and go out and work. I really want to go so I don't want to do plan B because then that's another three years before working full-time.' (40+, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive)

Some interviewees had fallback occupations that they would return to, or felt they could transfer into if their preferred occupation was not successful, as one respondent who moved from teaching back into the construction sector explains:

'So I knew that it may only be for a few years, maybe it's for 10 years, maybe I'd do it forever, but I was always quite realistic that I could get out of it quite easily and when I felt that happening, when I knew that was happening like I say I got out just like that'. (40+, Level 4 or above, employed)

The following pen portrait illustrates the career decisions of one respondent who described himself as strategic in his career decision-making approach.

A pen portrait of strategic career decision-making

One respondent, now in his fifties, has worked in education all of his working life. His father was a headmaster and he had followed him into teaching. He worked as a teacher, and was swiftly promoted to head of department, but decided not to apply for a deputy head position when the opportunity arose as he felt the role was too removed from direct teaching. He has had a lot of continuity in his career, of work, but even more so of purpose and has been very driven and motivated by providing a quality education to young people. This strong awareness of his individual interests and preferences, based on a strong set of career values, has guided his career.

He has developed his career in the area where he grew up, and limited the career opportunities he has considered to those in the region, because of the strength of his family ties and preference to be near to both his and his wife's wider family.

He is currently employed as a School Improvement Officer, working within a Local Authority. He described how his area of work is being stretched and there are planned changes and budget cuts to his department. He plans to work for a further five or six years until retiring and is considering his career options for this time period. He would like to continue to work in a role where he feels he is making a difference to the quality of education, and is considering the possibility of private or consultancy work in a similar field to his current role.

In order to inform this career decision, he is deliberately trying to keep abreast of developments in the field in order to keep up to date and informed and he is also seeking to maintain and develop his relevant professional networks. The sources of information he uses to find answers to his career questions are very specific to his work area, including specialist education websites, and his networks of ex-colleagues and professionals working in his field. For example, he sought information from ex-colleagues about how private work is contracted and feels he is able to get the most accurate information and advice from friends and colleagues working in the sector. He has found more generalist sources of information and advice less helpful as he feels they do not understand the sector sufficiently. He described his approach to staying aware of developments in the education sector in order to inform his decision whether or not to move job:

'I use the normal media to keep an eye on what's going on in the world of education, both in terms of paper press and other media. I talk to colleagues who are currently employed in the same sort of range of work as myself, the head teachers who work in consultancy modes and I keep my ear to the ground as to what's going on.'

In general, interviewees felt that having a strategic approach to career decision-making was a good thing, and some interviewees who felt they had not made past career decisions in this way reflected that they would use a more strategic approach in future. The examples below illustrate how two interviewees felt they now needed to be more strategic in their career decision-making. The first respondent reflected that he had drifted through the early part of his working life, responding to opportunities that came his way (his current occupation had been the suggestion of someone he had met at a party). The second example describes the impact of having children on a respondent's decision-making process:

'I would definitely tell my younger self, you need to worry about the rest of your life now. You can't keep putting off what you want to do. Sure, I don't know if that would have changed things in terms of me knowing what I wanted to do with my life at 20, but maybe it would make me more aware of planning for your future a bit more, rather than expecting life to take care of you.' (25-39, Level 4 or above, employed)

'I think the real focus for me now is that now I have a child of my own so there isn't this flexibility to just fall from place to place. There has to be some kind of strategy and some kind of plan...it's not just I, there's an 'us' that has to be taken care of.' (25-39, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

Other interviewees said they 'tested' their decisions with friends or family to give it a sense check or used their social networks to gather information and inform their decision-making process. Indeed, having a sounding board and gathering knowledge and insight from others was a key part of how some respondents informed their strategic decision-making approach. For example: *'I think what I've learnt is that whilst when you're younger you're probably going to have people who you know in terms of how they work whereas I think as I'm older I'm more likely to ask a wider range of people or get a wider range of views.'* (40+, Level 4 or above, employed).

Other interviewees rejected a co-produced style of decision-making saying they preferred to make decisions alone. For example: *'I think I trust myself more than somebody else because nobody else can ever know you as well as you do yourself.'* (40+, Level 4 or above, employed).

Exploratory career decision-making

Those using an exploratory approach to career decision-making were more reactive than strategic decision-makers, but were also reflective as they considered the suitability of opportunities, often after they had experienced them. The main difference was that it seemed to be a process of active external experimentation and trying and testing different options in practice rather than a sometimes more theoretical process of information gathering, self-reflection and prioritisation that characterised strategic decision-makers. Exploratory decision-makers described volunteering, sometimes being employed in a specific sector or occupation, and then evaluating how these work or learning opportunities fitted with their sense of self, their skills, and career goals.

This approach seemed to help interviewees to get a better understanding of the factors that can affect career decision-making, and specifically career, work and learning goals and identity, and to test out in reality the suitability of a specific occupation. The following pen portrait illustrates how one interviewee used an exploratory approach to inform their decision-making.

A pen portrait of exploratory decision-making

One respondent in his forties studied civil engineering at undergraduate level and initially wanted to work in the construction industry. His choice of work was influenced by his father who was a builder. He is currently working as a teacher, an occupation to which he has returned after working for a number of years as an architect (he had set up his own practice). He returned to teaching after needing more secure work following the recession in the building and construction sector.

The development of his teaching career started when he volunteered. Whilst studying for his undergraduate degree, his then girlfriend was a teacher and through her he became interested in teaching as he thought it would enable him to contribute to society. He did some voluntary work whilst at university as a teaching assistant in a local school and found he liked it. He said:

'It was a community based organisation…you got placed with the school if you were in it if you were interested in working with the kids or working with the school or something. So I did that … I helped in the technology department. So I acted as a technology technician or teaching assistant I don't think it was even a year it was one or two terms and I found that, I thought I'd give this a chance and see if I like this student environment and everything and I really did, I really enjoyed it, thought it was great.'

Based on this experience of volunteering, following the completion of his civil engineering degree he began to make plans to study for a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), the qualification required to become a teacher. Once successfully completing a PGCE, he moved to London and got his first teaching job. He taught for five years before deciding he needed a career change. It was at this point he moved into architecture. He decided to fall back on his teaching qualification following the recession, and has been teaching in a Further Education setting for the last four years. As he experienced before, after teaching for a few years he is feeling like he needs to move on, but he felt that the opportunities for architects remain poor. His exploratory approach to career decision-making has effectively enabled him to maintain careers in two occupations which he has found invaluable to helping him to be flexible in the face of changing labour market opportunities and constraints.

Explorers quite frequently had fragmented career histories, but by choice. They are open individuals and often very aspirational and driven. They are in some cases motivated by causes (such as sustainable living) and are trying to find their niche. Their decision-making is often a process of elimination, identifying skills, tasks or sectors that they do, as well as do not, want to work in, as the two examples below illustrate:

'I think if I was to live there [off the grid] for a long time, my aspirational view of what I was capable of would maybe fall, and I'd feel quite disillusioned by [it]… because you're quite influenced by your surroundings and the people you're around, so I think if anything, that experience pushed me forward to go and do something else, rather than making me move towards living outside the system.' (25-39, Level 4 or above, unemployed/inactive)

'Everything I've jumped into I've always wanted to be for a long time ago but when you jump in, it's actually different than what you thought it would be like. You have to experience it and find out for yourself… It's not just the job description from the outside and think that's boring or whatever it is. There are pros and cons to every job.' (25-39, unknown qualifications, unemployed, inactive)

Opportunistic career decision-making

Some career decisions were taken using a less strategic or exploratory approach, and primarily by responding to opportunities when they arose without necessarily having a planned career direction. Interviewees using this approach to career decision-making tended to feel that it was not possible to know what the future might hold, or where they might end up, and that as they made their way through their working life they would react to opportunities. Sometimes this group had fragmented career histories, but their previously acquired skills act as building blocks towards the next step, rather than a tool for elimination, as with those who use a more exploratory decision-making style. Interviewees using this decision-making style tended to see their career as constantly evolving and the tasks they take on as a building block to the next step. They are driven and will jump at opportunities to take on additional tasks or responsibilities, not necessarily because they want to or enjoy them, but because they see them as an opportunity for progression. For example:

'One of my bosses said "do you fancy doing the ordering? What you need to do is this". And then I would say "while I was doing it, I noticed that this is wrong or that's wrong, and I think you should do it this way". And they would go, "oh my God, yes, you do that now, that's your job". And it built like that.' (40+, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive)

'So all the things they've asked me, would you mind doing, I've done it for experience, not because yes, I want to do it, but I think if someone says to me can you do FSM, which is a finance management, I've been on it, I've seen it, I can do parts of it and that would go in my favour. So I do do things that are not on my job description, yes. […] But I think, things happen for a reason and so far, as to what I've done up to now, I'm quite happy and confident that I can achieve, I'll say, the more impossible things that I've done.' (25-39, Level 2 or 3, employed)

Interviewees using an opportunistic approach to career decision-making responded opportunistically to situations that arose but were also actively cultivating career decision-making opportunities through their social networks and were active at learning and development and keeping their skills and qualifications. Those interviewees with this decision-making style were often satisfied with the outcomes of their career, and hence their career decision-making approach. Being able to respond to and make the most of career, work and learning opportunities in a more structured way, sometimes with a goal in mind, was described by one respondent who was returning to learning, but who was not sure where her course would take her:

> *'When I go to uni that is when I'm going to know more jobs that I'm going to be interested in and then just go from there…I never thought in my Access Course I'd be on the Sociology and Social Policy course, because I'd never really actually heard of Sociology before. That's what I mean, who knows what I'm going to learn in uni to bring me where I'm going to go from there, no idea. But I just know that uni will get me better jobs, better careers than if I don't go.'* (40+, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive)

Others described how they used this approach to their working decisions. It was common for interviewees in this group not to have a clear career goal, although they may have clear career values or other facets of their career, work and learning identity. One respondent who had held a variety of types of job role in her working life described her approach:

> *'It's always been a little bit...taking what's come my way... It's basically making the most of the situation. It's using your networks and making the most of situations you're in, and saying yes, basically'.* (25-39, Level 4 or above, employed)

A pen portrait of how one respondent made their career decisions using an opportunistic career decision-making style is outlined below.

Pen portrait of opportunistic career decision-making

One respondent aged 25-39 and in employment described her varied career. She had studied for an HND in social care and then a degree in social policy. At the outset of her degree she thought that she might want to work as a teacher, but during the course of her degree she 'went off the idea' and began to wonder if she might like to work supporting offenders and young people. In the run up to her graduation, she described an unstructured career approach and *'was applying for all sorts of different jobs. I don't know what I was thinking'*.

One of these applications was to work in the USA, and this was successful, so during her early twenties she worked supporting people with learning difficulties. After working in this role for a while, she wanted to return home. On her return, she quickly found temporary administrative work in a Housing Association, and shortly after had her first child. After six months maternity leave, she found work in student services in a college.

The college was a large employer and exposed her to new job roles and offered her the opportunity to gain qualifications. When she was offered the opportunity to study for a qualification in Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) at Level 3, she said yes.

Gaining this qualification opened up other job roles to her within the local area. After having her second child she applied to work for a careers organisation, using her new qualification. This organisation offered her the opportunity to study for a Level 4 qualification in IAG and again she took this opportunity.

Two years later she applied to work in a careers role at another organisation, but was unsuccessful with her application. However, the organisation offered her a role in training and said they would support her to undertake a Professional Graduate Diploma of Education in order to develop her skills for the training role. She accepted this job, and is currently training others and studying for this qualification.

She had continued to learn throughout her career. She had used opportunities as they arose to develop her skills and experience, and had ended up in job roles that she had not planned, although they have tended to link to each other. She reflected that her opportunistic approach to decision-making had worked well for her and was one that she would continue to use as she now considered where her career might go next in the face of restructuring and possible redundancies at her current employer. She summed up her approach to career decision-making saying:

'It's very much in the hands of the Gods really what happens. I don't really know. I don't know if I've ever really known where I wanted to go, it's all depended on what's come along.'

A risk with this approach to career decision-making is that there is a chance that opportunities will simply not come along. There were cases of interviewees who had previously taken any work that a friend, for example, suggested or helped them to find, who now found that these sources of work had dried up and they found it difficult to move forward with their career.

There were also examples of interviewees who were finding it difficult to make a career decision, in part because they lacked the skills to consider and understand their options in a structured way. These tended to be interviewees whose reason for making a career decision came from the internal influences on the decision-making process, such as a reassessment of their career, work and learning identity and goals. They tended not to have approached earlier career decisions in a strategic or planned way and were therefore finding it difficult to assess their work and learning options. In these instances it tended to be the case that the respondent did not yet have clear or useable information or understanding about the one or more aspects of the things they needed to know in order to make a career decision and were therefore unable to use the kind of planned or considered career decision-making approach they would have liked. There is a clear role here for careers services to guide and support individuals and to help them to develop the skills for self-reflection, information gathering and applying this to their circumstances.

Impulsive career decision-making

As described in earlier chapters, how people made a career decision could be emotional and instinctive, with little or no thought about their real options or the consequences of their decision. Several interviewees described times when they had made a career decision, such as leaving their current employment (often without another job), on the spur of the moment. On reflection, many felt that their approach to making such a career decision should have been more measured and thought through, particularly as some had found it difficult to find employment since. For example:

> *'I went into hospital, I got diagnosed with type 1 diabetes and they [the employer] weren't very helpful at all. They put my hours down and I was going for a promotion and they refused to promote me because I was off work for a week. I just felt I was going nowhere and they really wouldn't help me so I just made the decision there and then and just left…. I should have really got another job before I left but it was just one of those mad decisions that you make.'* (18-24, Level 2 or 3, unemployed/inactive)

This was not the first impulsive career decision this interviewee had made, as the following pen portrait of her work and learning experience illustrates, but having reflected on the outcomes of her decision making in the past, she was now trying to become more strategic and reflective in her career decision-making approach.

A pen portrait of impulsive career decision-making

One respondent in her twenties was unemployed at the time of the interview. She had gone to college after school, studying for a health and social care qualification and at the outset of the course hoped to go on to work in this sector. She wanted to work part-time while she studied at college. Her course was full-time and she found if difficult to find a job that fitted around her learning commitments. Ten months into her one year college course, she decided to leave the course, without gaining the qualification, meaning that she was not qualified to work in the health and social care sector. She described some family issues at the time that influenced her decision to leave education, but she also found a full-time job working in catering and was pleased to be able to earn a wage. This was the first of her impulsive decisions that she had made without thinking through the consequences.

She started off enjoying her new job, but over time found her colleagues and the organisation's management not to be supportive and they did not help her to develop her skills. She became ill and around this time was overlooked for a promotion. She also described having her working hours reduced from full to part-time. After three years at the organisation she decided to hand in her notice without any other work to go to. She also had rent and other bills to pay. This was the second of her impulsive career decisions, and one which she has come to regret as she has been unable to find permanent work since.

She was now considering becoming self-employed in the health and fitness industry selling weight management, skincare and fitness products. She has been trying to be more strategic about her next career decision and has been actively seeking the advice of friends and family who are self-employed to better understand what this might mean for her.

Other interviewees described relying on their 'gut instinct' in order to make a decision, but this was often as part of a more strategic and less spontaneous approach to career decision-making overall.

Passive career decision-making

One group described themselves as relatively passive in the decision-making process. They reported to be 'laid back' or 'drifting' and responded to career opportunities as they presented themselves. Several interviewees who described how they had taken a 'laid-back' approach to career decisions in the past, reflected that this approach had led them to make poor decisions. Some interviewees felt they reacted to the choices they were presented with, but that their decision had been uninformed. For example, some reflected on making choices about what to study at school, and later realised they had inadvertently limited their future work choices through their subject choice.

Some, but not many, of the participants had set their minds to a particular career path at a very young age. Their choice was often influenced by family members (eg a family tradition of working as electricians or in mining) or getting involved with a particular type of work on an (initially) voluntary basis at a young age. Quite frequently though these

individuals expressed disillusionment with their early choices, and wished they had engaged in more career exploration.

A passive approach to decision-making could also have consequences for people's working lives. One respondent with a degree reflected that drifting into any type of work in his early twenties following his graduation, in a field that was not what he wanted to do, made it difficult for him to find work in the occupation he really wanted:

> *'Don't waste those three years and don't waste the immediate time afterwards. If you find yourself in a cushy job in a video shop that you could literally go to in your slippers because it might be fun, but the longer you leave it, the harder it is to find a job.'* (25-39, Level 4 or above, employed)

Other interviewees who had used a passive approach to career decision-making in the past described how their approach to making career decisions now had changed. For example:

> *'I'm a lot more strict with my choices these days than what I was when I was younger. Definitely. Not just with choices but the way I conduct myself through making learning and work decisions…I don't let myself be as lackadaisical. None of this, oh, it'll wait till tomorrow.'* (25-39, Level 2 or 3, employed)

> *'In hindsight, and obviously it's a lot easier to look back once you've grown up, I wish I would've focused more, I wish I would've not listened to people and actually stood my ground. […] and I think, from there on in, it was just a knock on effect because I didn't even eventually get to university, which is where, from a young age, I'd always wanted to be.'* (25-39, Level 2 or 3, employed)

Section 4.3 described the influence of social norms on interviewees' career decision-making. Some interviewees described their career decisions and the strong role that others had had in not only influencing that decision, but in some cases making a decision for them, while they had a passive role in the process. The influence of others on an individual's decision-making process seemed to be related to age, with younger interviewees seemingly more likely to seek a steer about work and learning from others than older interviewees. Using others to support the career decision-making process in this way may be a result of an individual's lack of confidence in their skills to be able to self-reflect, gather relevant information and apply it to their situation.

In the following pen portrait, one young respondent who was struggling to find a career identity described how her father was going to guide her and help to structure her career decision-making process.

Pen portrait of passive career decision-making

One young woman, aged 19, left school three years ago. She had a longstanding childhood career goal to become a hairdresser and worked part-time in a hairdressers in order to gain work experience whilst she was at school. She had had a difficult relationship with her family throughout her teenage years and had spent some time homeless after being asked to leave the family home. This change of personal circumstances severely constrained her work and learning options and she was absent from her penultimate year at school, and was made redundant from her hairdressing job because the temporary accommodation found for her by her social worker was too far away. This was one example of a decision affecting her work and learning being taken by others and out of her control. She had found this period of homelessness frightening and it shaped the importance she placed on working in order to secure a home.

After five months in temporary accommodation she returned to school and completed her GCSEs. After school she trained and gained a Level 1 qualification in hairdressing. Since gaining this qualification she has had a range of jobs, but at the time of interview was out of work. She felt she now needed to focus again on what she wanted to do in the future, as hairdressing is no longer her career goal. She sees hairdressing as a useful skill to fallback on, but it is no longer something that inspires her. She has applied for and worked in other jobs, but is not really sure what type of work she would be suited to. She needed to earn a wage in order to pay her rent, and therefore felt that returning to study was not an option open to her.

She has recently moved near to her family and is on good terms again with parents, although living independently. To help her career decision-making she was planning to speak to her parents whom she hoped would be able to suggest relevant careers to her. Her father was in the army, and in the past had tended to recommend army careers to her, but she was hoping he might be able to help her decide on something outside of the sector that he worked in. She was keen to receive some structured input and a steer from others in deciding what to do next, and seemed to be taking her next career decision quite passively as she expected to be guided by her father. She said:

'I'm going to my parents' house this weekend, obviously for Mothers' Day, and my dad, he's like me; he won't stop talking… Obviously he's older than me, so he knows. He will sit down with me, and he'll sit at the table, and he'll get all these different jobs out, and he will sit, and he will not let me move, even if I need the toilet, he will not let me move until I make a slight decision, which I've asked him to do…if you ring me on Monday, I'll probably be able to tell you what I'm doing for the rest of my life, after Monday.'

Another respondent who had mental health problems reported that she tended to ask close members of her family to make career decisions on her behalf:

> *'I'm not good – mental health is still a problem, because I'm not good at making decisions. I phoned my sister; my sister said "is the other job guaranteed permanent?" And I said, "yes, it's less money, it's easier to get to and it's guaranteed permanent". She said "take that one, because they didn't let you down before".'* (40+, Level 2 or 3, employed)

5.4 Comparing our model of career decision-making styles

In this section we compare the findings from our model of career decision-making styles with two models. The purpose of this is to enhance the analysis and interpretation of the data. First we compare the model of decision-making styles with a customer segmentation model developed for and used by the NCS and outlined earlier in section 2.1. This analysis will help the NCS to assess what decision-making styles customers in their target groups are most likely to use.

We introduced the MINDSPACE framework in section 2.1 as a useful way of summarising the key behavioural influences on decision-making (outlined in more detail in the Annex). We have chosen to review and interpret our findings in light of this framework as the data presented in section 5.3 about career decision-making suggest that many career decisions are not taken 'rationally'. Therefore a framework that does not assume full cognitive choices may help us to interpret the findings and delivery implications.

5.4.1 Segmentation of NCS customers

Ipsos MORI (2009, unpublished) developed a segmentation model of NCS customers (for more information on the model, see the Annex). The model of career decision-making developed as a result of this research focuses on the process of making a career decision. By contrast the unpublished Ipsos MORI model focuses on the individual's circumstances and to some extent the outcomes of their decisions.

Based on the descriptions of the segment characteristics (outlined in more detail in the Annex), and the extent to which constraints and personal circumstances seemed to affect individual's decision-making style, we have mapped the decision-making styles that are most likely to be adopted by people within each customer segment. This is detailed in Table 5.2. However, it should be noted that we observed some variety in decision-making styles between people with similar characteristics and constraints, so this mapping is necessarily broad-brush, while in reality the situation would be more nuanced and individuals in any of the groups could adopt any of the decision-making styles.

Table 5.2: Mapping customer segments to decision-making styles

Segment	Decision-making style
On track	Strategic; Exploratory
Transitional	Strategic; Exploratory; Opportunistic
Fixated	Opportunistic; Impulsive
Would if I could	Passive; Impulsive; Opportunistic
Trapped	Passive; Impulsive
Dispirited	Passive; Impulsive

Source: IES, 2013

Individuals with a clear goal or who have an understanding of their career values, interests and preferences are more likely to be able to use a strategic decision-making approach, as this style requires some self-reflection and self-insight. Those with a clearer sense of direction seem less likely to make impulsive decisions, as this could risk throwing them off track. The 'On track' and 'Transitional' segments seem to have some of the characteristics that would enable individuals to use strategic career decision-making should they wish. Equally individuals in these groups may use exploratory or opportunistic styles of decision-making, as these also allow for individuals who are aware of and understand their interests and preferences and who are looking consciously at work and learning options.

The other customer segments seem less well-placed to be able to use strategic decision-making in their current circumstances, and it seems that without a sense of understanding and reflection on their career interests and preferences, then individuals in any of the four groups (fixated; would if I could; trapped; dispirited) could make impulsive decisions. The 'fixated' and 'would if I could' segments could both display opportunistic decision-making styles as each has a reason for taking opportunities that come their way: the 'fixated' group because they have a clear career goal, and the 'would if I could' group because they have a belief that there are opportunities that would improve their situation.

A passive decision-making style seems most likely to be adopted by the 'would if I could', 'trapped', and 'dispirited' groups. Each of these groups has some characteristics that mean they are likely not to be looking widely at their career options, nor really owning their career decisions or considering the implications. For example, the 'would if I could' group are not sure how to access appropriate help, the 'trapped' group have a low belief that opportunity exists for them to take control of their life, and the 'dispirited' group have faced set-backs and are currently disengaged.

The Ipsos-MORI segmentation aimed to segment the careers market and understand how individual's needs could be met by the NCS service, while our model aimed to explore how people make careers decisions. Despite these differing aims, the data and Table 5.2 suggest some overlap between the Ipsos-MORI customer segments and the model of career decision-making styles, indicating that the six customer segments were found in the interviews carried out for this research to some extent. The delineation in the Ipsos-MORI model based on the extent to which an individual has a defined career goal and an intention to enter progressive employment may not quite match the importance of having a

goal to career decision-making found in our data. Our interviews suggested that having a clear career goal was not necessarily a pre-requisite for making successful career decisions. For example, one group of individuals navigated their careers quite opportunistically, not necessarily with a goal in mind. The Ipsos-MORI segments are generally focused on learning, skills and employment, whereas our data would suggest that a range of other influences are important in determining how someone views the work, learning and life priorities that affect their career. Finally, the Ipsos-MORI model necessarily takes customers as individuals, as the NCS is an individual-facing service, whereas our evidence suggests that often individuals are taking career decisions as a household. Overall, while we observe the segments in the Ipsos-MORI model in our data, our findings would suggest that there is a greater complexity and range of influences on individual's careers than is explained in the Ipsos-MORI segmentation.

5.4.2   The MINDSPACE framework

The MINDSPACE framework brings together *'nine of the most robust (non-coercive) influences on behaviour'*, as recognised in behavioural economics, and supplemented by insights from psychology, to support the application of behavioural theory to public policy (Dolan et al., 2010). MINDSPACE summarises behavioural effects rather than being a 'model of the world' explaining behaviour, motivations and barriers. Further detail about each of the effects in the MINDSPACE framework and how they affect behaviour is given in the Annex.

Comparing our findings against the MINDSPACE framework, we find that **Messengers** (the people or channels that communicate information or advice) are important for all career decision-making styles (with the exception of some impulsive decisions). However the influence of the messenger can vary: for passive decision-makers, messengers can make the decision, for opportunistic decision-makers they can signal an opportunity, and for exploratory and strategic decision-makers they can help an individual firm up decisions. There are varied messengers in play in the process of career decision-making (section 4.2) but these fall into two key groups. The first group are formal messengers; some of these were perceived by respondents to communicate public policy messages about getting work of any kind, rather than necessarily finding work of interest (section 4.2.4). These formal experts include careers advisers in learning environments, in the NCS and in Jobcentre Plus. These formal sources can be particularly influential in providing practical help to get work or find learning (section 4.2.4). The second group are informal messengers and consist primarily of parents, partners and friends, but also of teachers and employers (section 4.2.1 and 4.2.2). Although not necessarily viewed by individuals as experts (in terms of their knowledge of the labour market), they are likely to be similar to the individual decision-maker and well-liked – so arguably are experts about the decision-maker. People are therefore likely to trust and act on information provided by these personal experts and there were many examples of the influence of informal messengers on career decision-making among our respondents (section 4.2.1 and 4.2.2).

Incentives – these can be a perceived reward or a potential loss and can be short or long-term and our findings suggest they play a part in career decision-making. The theory posits that individuals discount the future and live for today and immediate rewards, at the expense of tomorrow. However the evidence from this research suggests that some people are thinking to the future (if they can), and these tend to be individuals who are

more self aware and are strategic and exploratory decision-makers, who can overlook short-term losses for longer-term gain (section 5.3). For example forgoing earnings to study full-time in order to advance in a particular field and enhance their perceived employability. The career values of respondents – the values and motives that individuals will not give up when having to make decisions – could be perceived as incentives, and these were varied (and not just related to money, section 3.1). They included: security and stability which could be provided by a 'good salary' but could be non-monetary such as job security or settling in a particular location; helping others and doing something meaningful in their work; challenge, pressure and excitement in work; respect and recognition from peers; a good work-life balance to allow them time with family; and/or job-satisfaction. There was some evidence that career decision-making styles evolved over time, and thus the type and nature of incentives. Impulsive decision-making tended to be used by respondents when they were younger (section 5.3). Perhaps during this time they discount the future, but as respondents matured and reflected on their career, many moved to more strategic and considered decision-making styles, styles that placed more value on the future. Those who had regretted previous decisions tended now to be looking further ahead, mindful that career decisions have long-term impact and that getting to where you want can take longer-term investment (section 5.3).

Norms – the behaviours expected of us by our parents, friends and social groups and indeed the wider society – clearly influenced the career choices of individuals and played a part in many decisions (sections 4.3.4 and 4.3.5). Individuals could be encouraged into considering certain options that they or others felt were right for them and/or encouraged to strive to achieve more challenging goals. However they could also be limited and discouraged by the expectations of others, constraining choices and affecting their self belief and sense of self efficacy in setting and achieving goals. There is evidence of strong social pressure in early adult life (eg around when to leave school) and some interviewees felt that this has changed over the past few decades, particularly for women. Norms now revolve around staying on in education after school, whatever gender, to gain qualifications and evidence skills in order to facilitate labour market entry and progression; and this had not been the case for several older respondents. It is interesting to note that for some of these older individuals these norms can be adopted retrospectively and instil a desire to return to education in later life. Career norms become more diverse and changed over time, but the interviews suggest: a) a theme around progression within professional careers – the expectation that individuals will move upwards and aspire to roles with responsibility and leadership (section 3.1); and b) a theme around nurturing for women who work – the expectation that they should put their family first (so reducing their hours, moving to a job closer to home, or leaving work altogether) (sections 3.2.1 and 3.2.2).

This research indicates the wide variety of career decisions individuals can and do make, and an array of options that they have to choose from. Theory posits that default options will be the most attractive to individual decision-makers, and it is easier to go with the flow than choose from too many options. However 'pre-set options' and **defaults** do not readily exist in contemporary careers. Individuals have different backgrounds, skills levels and values (as clearly evidenced by this research) so there is no one fall-back path that will fit all. Arguably in the past there were local defaults such as going to work in the local factory, mine or office, but the options now are much broader. These options can be too numerous and confusing to individuals and so they can and do limit their options to a more

manageable number: they can unconsciously and automatically discount options before they begin their decision-making process, they can be bounded by expectations (norms), and they can consult a narrow range of information sources (section 2.1). Those who severely limit their options tend to be individuals with a passive decision-making style, and there were examples of respondents taking up work opportunities suggested by people in their networks (section 4.2.1), and being forced into an action by a change of circumstance coming 'out of the blue' (rather than consciously making a career decision) (section 5.2).

When looking to the outside world, respondents tended to have a narrow field of vision (ie in terms of the type of work they would consider) and tended to search for and filter opportunities and information based on these preferences and what seemed relevant to their circumstances (**salience**) (section 4.1.1). This characteristic is most likely to be true of strategic, exploratory and opportunistic decision-making styles as respondents using the other two career decision-making styles were less actively looking for information. Career support could have a role in trying to broaden the horizon of information that individuals view as relevant to them (see delivery implication B3).

From our data it is difficult to see the effect of **priming** (early exposure to ideas) on career decision-making. It is possible that role models and family expectations may have this type of influence, and clearly teachers and careers advisers in educational establishments can have a priming role (section 4.2.4 and 4.2.5). These individuals can expose young people to a wider range of career options, and can help them to develop a sense of ownership of their decisions and provide them with tools to help with decisions. Individuals may then return to seek out formal careers support when they recognise that it is needed.

The evidence suggests that emotion and **affect** have a strong influence on career decision-making and we have a style of career decision-making to reflect this (section 5.3). Impulsive career decision-makers act on emotional instinct, take quick and often 'snap' decisions and give little or no thought to options or consequences. Emotion could be experienced in the workplace, for example as stress or bullying; in life outside of work as grief on the death of a close family member, break-down of a relationship or deterioration of health; and emotion could be experienced in the interaction between home and work-life. The event and the accompanying emotion could lead to substantial career decision points. For the impulsive decision-makers, it could lead to a quick change in work (there were numerous of examples of sudden anger with work stress or not enjoying the work itself (section 5.2) leading to work exit), for some individuals it could lead to a short-term passive decision-making style, and for strategic decision-makers it could lead to a period of self reflection and re-assessment of priorities and values.

Theory posits that if we make a **commitment** or promise, to others or to ourselves, we are more likely to act upon this. In this sense, a commitment could be regarded as having an expressed career goal which friends, family and formal sources of information and advice could support. Arguably the more that others facilitate progress towards our goals and the further we progress, the more we feel 'locked in' to this path. In general, this is a positive and reinforcing influence however this can create challenges if individuals need to make changes due to external events (such as lack of finance, change in location, change in health) or indeed due to a change of heart (feeling they are no longer suited to or able to achieve their goal). Goals can be short-term (and easier to fulfil) such as completing a

course of learning or longer term (and open to change) such as becoming a successful lawyer; but they require a clearly defined view of self and a clear idea of career (and how the two fit together. Those with strategic and exploratory decision-making styles were reflective and tended to have clear career plans and goals, whereas passive and impulsive decision-makers had no clear aspirations and so effectively had no commitments.

Individuals like to feel good about themselves, their decisions and actions (to appeal to their **egos**) and tend to respond well to expectation. If an individual feels that they are in control of their decision (understand their preferences, know all the options, and are aware of the potential barriers/challenges) and feels that others expect them to be able to make a good decision, then they will do so. With hindsight many respondents felt they had made bad decisions in the past, decisions that led to poor or bad outcomes (section 5.3). These interviewees did not feel in control of their decision-making, often found the process of making a decision overwhelming and tended to blame circumstances (beyond their control) which they felt forced them to make unsuitable decisions. This led them to reassess their decision-making styles and to aim to be more strategic.

Overall we see many of the factors explained in the MINDSPACE framework at play in adult career decision-making. The MINDSPACE framework does not segment career decision-makers, rather it highlights a number of sources of influence. The public policy messages – get a job, get on a course – were heard by respondents, but do not seem to contain all the important messages to shape the career decision-making process effectively. These would include 'get a job you want to do', 'look for a job which accommodates your constraints but still stretches you', 'expect it to take some time to get into the work you want to do', and 'consider opportunities that come your way'.

5.5 **Conclusions**

The trigger for a career decision can be planned or unplanned, and can be the result of change in any of the influences on career decision-making described in Chapters 3 and 4. Career 'decisions' can be exploratory and not time-bounded. Equally they can be the result of a change that required immediate action. The extent to which these decision-making points were planned or unplanned and the timeframe for action is likely to influence the type of career decision-making style individuals can use.

The decision-making styles found in this research reflect the findings from behavioural sciences and other disciplines outlined in Chapter 2, including that decision-making is not rational. Through our qualitative approach, individuals recalled and recounted the conscious decisions they have made throughout their career. While the data suggest that our interviewees were able to reflect on the influence and importance of factors in shaping their career decision-making, including those that one might assume to operate sub-consciously to some extent such as the influence of society, the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 means that we must also acknowledge that there will have been career options that our interviewees made decisions about sub-consciously, and other influences which the research cannot capture in describing how adults make career decisions. The aspects of the MINDSPACE framework were applied to help interpret the interview evidence and to consider how policy and practice may respond and this is further discussed in Chapter 7.

Overall, many of the MINDSPACE factors were evidence in our data and the framework helps to highlight a number of sources of influence.

While some approaches to career decision-making are more planned than others, most respondents were weighing up and assessing the range of influences on career decision-making to some extent and were trying to make the most of their circumstances and constraints. Chance and unplanned events played a role in many interviewees' careers, and how individuals responded to that was captured by the opportunistic decision-making style. There are similarities between this decision-making style and the theory of planned happenstance outlined in section 2.1 which also highlights how individuals can use chance events as a positive platform for career development.

Individuals that were most constrained tended to find it more challenging to have a longer-term horizon with regards to decision-making. Indeed some individuals did not actively seek information, and this limited the decision-making styles they used. Individuals that did not seek information were most likely to make passive or impulsive decisions. There is therefore an issue about how careers services can engage with and 'push' relevant information to people who need it. This is discussed further in the delivery implications in section 7.3. This finding also relates to how individuals try to reduce the burden of career decision-making by using (mental) shortcuts, a process outlined from the literature in Chapter 2. We certainly saw examples of the strong influence that family or chance encounters had had on interviewees at specific times in their career, particularly among passive and opportunistic decision-makers. Encouraging individuals to actively seek information and consider a wider range of career options formed one axis of the model of career decision-making styles (Figure 5.1) and makes individuals more likely to use strategic or exploratory decision-making styles. The model of career decision-making styles demonstrates a role for career IAG in helping people to develop their career decision-making skills thereby reducing the use of short-cuts, and improving awareness of interests and preferences, and helping people to consider a larger number of labour market options. The delivery implications for careers services of these findings will be explored in more detail in Chapter 7 after we present that evidence about career decision-making from the interviews with prisoners.

6 Prisoner research findings

This chapter presents the evidence from fifteen prisoners who were interviewed across two male prisons and one female establishment; 10 men and five women. This contrasts with 50 people in the main stage interviews, the result being that, whilst there were discernable trends across individuals, cases had fewer common factors than was the case in the other element of the study and this is reflected in how the evidence is reported. Both past and future plans were covered during the main stage and prison interviews, but prisoners' views tended, due to their current circumstances, to be more future-oriented than the main stage sample. The research design was not longitudinal so we cannot be sure whether intended goals will be realised. In this chapter, first we provide an overview of career decision-making among the sample, before reflecting on the internal and then the external factors that were influencing their career decision-making. Finally, we present evidence about the sample of prisoners' career decision-making styles. Comparisons and contrasts between the prison and main stage sample are provided in Chapter 7.

Key findings

Fifteen prisoners were interviewed in three prisons; one in the North East (a resettlement prison for Category C and D prisoners); one in the North West (a female establishment) and one in the South West (a prison for Category C prisoners with a focus on accredited education and training programmes).[2]

In general, interviewees did not define their journey as a 'career' and for many their behaviour, their crime and their time in prison loomed large in their narrative. Some had followed a fairly typical career path before their sentence with occupation changes along the way. Other interviewees' early careers had been dominated by petty crime and no steady employment. One group of interviewees had fragmented work histories, with work interspersed with spells in prison and abuse of drugs and/or alcohol. Several of the people we interviewed had their own businesses prior to their sentence and expected to return to these on their release.

There was little evidence of interviewees having a specific career goal or field of work in mind from a young age, and most seemed to have worked in jobs that came their way, or to have been guided by other work values, such as the desire to manage their own business. The extent, and at times precarious nature, of their experience of self-employment and business ownership seemed to have added to the sense of rapid change and uncertainty in many of the narratives.

On the whole, prisoners did not reflect on past career experiences except where, as a result of their reflection during their sentences, they had drawn lessons from past mistakes. Most focused on how to move on from their past offending behaviour.

---

[2]   See Glossary for explanation of prisoner categories.

The prison environment provides a focus on self reflection and this had resulted in several interviewees reconsidering their values and priorities, both with what they wanted from work in the future and much more broadly in terms of how to rebuild family relationships and how to live their lives in the future. Whilst the context may be very different from most people's experience, prisoners are balancing the same types of issues as the main stage population, although they may be more constrained in their circumstances and opportunities and place greater emphasis on some of the factors influencing career decision-making, such as the consequences of drug addiction.

Time in prison had given interviewees the opportunity to reflect on what they wanted in the future. There were striking examples of prisoners who had reached positive states of mind during their sentences. They had been in very dark places initially but had managed to address their issues by various routes including learning and restorative justice.

Several interviewees reported that they had poor experiences of school, with experiences of exclusion not uncommon, and they typically had low or no qualifications from compulsory schooling. Many had improved or were improving their qualifications within the prison setting. Among those that had undertaken learning, the selection of courses in prison was not always related to future career options or with a specific work goal in mind. Some interviewees wanted to undertake any learning opportunity available, others had developed career ideas as a result of their learning, and others tried to find and enrol on courses that were well-matched to their future work identities.

Making the most of one's time inside appeared to be a sub-culture within prison, as was engaging in learning and giving something back/supporting other prisoners. Many individuals were encouraged to gain key skills and qualifications, starting with literacy and numeracy, or to address issues relating to their offences such as drug and/or alcohol dependency. Several interviewees talked about the support they provided to other prisoners, either with help when they first arrived, pastoral support, help with basic skills, or help with housing. These prisoners worked as peer mentors, outreach orderlies, Listeners, trainers, and drugs/solvent abuse counsellors.

Prior to their time in prison, sources of advice and support had included family, friends, their partners and wider influences including teachers and school careers advisers. Several interviewees talked about how their families had helped them to get work. Some actually worked with their families, in established family businesses or in businesses that they had set up in partnership with family members. Some interviewees also talked about the negative influences of peers on their choices and decisions, and how they influenced key decisions that led them into criminal activity.

When in prison, family and friends remained a source of information, advice and support for dealing with their period in custody and particularly when making plans for their release. Much of the support for work and learning decisions came from prison and agency staff and, to some extent, from other prisoners. Prisoners can access informal advice from prison or external provider staff more or less on demand, certainly at short notice.

For those interviewees who could focus on work and learning, and were not overwhelmed by other things, such as recovering from drug addiction, the prisoners interviewed in the study seemed to approach their career decisions in much the same way as the general population. Some were and had been very passive in their behaviour; others were opportunistic, making the most of business and work opportunities that came their way; and others were trying to be strategic in their approach.

6.1 Overview of career decision-making

All but one of the respondents were within conceptual distance of release and the decisions that they would have to take about their future careers. It was not possible to record the interviews in HMP Styal, so there are fewer direct quotes from female respondents than the males. Three other interviews also had to be recorded manually either for technical reasons or because respondents did not give their permission for the interviews to be recorded. Accordingly contributions from non-recorded interviews are given from the notes made during the discussion.

In this chapter, we will consider how prisoners have made their career decisions in the past and how they are thinking about their future career whilst serving their sentences. In general, interviewees did not define their journey as a 'career' and for many their behaviour, their crime and their time in prison loomed large in their narrative and for some these aspects were a greater part of their narrative than their experiences outside of prison; indeed some had little or no formal working history.

Those who had been serial drug abusers from a young age had not had anything other than a cursory engagement with paid work. They had been passive in career terms, following a group of like-minded people and, in most cases, rejecting family values. For them, their future career was also their first, therefore presenting significant challenges over and above the challenges of staying clear of drugs. In these instances, their constraints included a lack of work history and experience.

Some had followed a fairly conventional career path before their sentence with occupation changes along the way. They attributed these changes to a variety of factors, including pregnancy, a desire for occupational change, and the need for more flexible working hours through self-employment or because they felt they were making the most of work and learning opportunities as they arose. Some of the interviewees' early careers had been dominated by petty crime and no steady employment. Several of the people we interviewed had their own businesses prior to their sentence and expected to return to these on their release and others in the sample were self-employed. The proportion of entrepreneurial interviewees in our sample seems slightly higher than might be expected. Data indicates that of those offenders who had a job pre-custody, about 19 per cent were self-employed (Hopkins, 2012). The Annual Population Survey (via Nomis) shows the self-

employment rate for 16-64 year-olds[3] in England and Wales for the financial year 2005/2006 was 9.2 per cent (BIS, 2013).

Clearly, incarceration had encouraged our interviewees to reflect on their lives and how they want to move forward. There was significant variation in how prisoners viewed their past and future careers and the influence that particular factors would have on their future decision-making compared to their past decisions. All the prisoners we spoke to described a turning point, a light bulb moment, or period after they were convicted when they focused on dealing with the issues that they felt had caused their conviction.

There is an enforced discontinuity in prisoner's careers which imposes both a clear decision of its own ('what will I do when I get out?') and a clear time frame. This is much sharper than the varied timeframes on which our non-prison sample were thinking about short-term and longer-term options.

Most prisoners drew heavily on their family values and direct support in their rehabilitation and in thinking about their future career decisions. Many cited their parents' values or their children acting as role models as a reference point for their decision to change their offending behaviour. Others were motivated by their children or grandchildren and wanted to be reunited with them above all else.

In many cases, prisoners had drawn heavily on the support of prison, agency staff and other prisoners for advice and support in changing their behaviour and planning the way forward. There were also understandable limits on prison resources and at times this impacted on an institution's ability to respond to a prisoner's needs immediately and sometimes at all. This meant that some prisoners had been moved several times before arriving at an establishment that could provide the course they required in order to develop their skills and qualifications in line with their career interests.

What was important for prisoners was to find a narrative that made sense for their futures. This could be based on becoming an effective, as opposed to simply a biological, parent; finding a faith; or by making a positive contribution to society through success in business; or giving something back by helping fellow prisoners.

Restorative justice played a key role in the story of some prisoners and had directly impacted on their decision to make best use of the opportunity that prison afforded for development through learning and moving into work. Coincidentally perhaps, people who mentioned this were passionate in talking about their career plan. They drew considerable strength from the process even though it had been painful for them and, they recognised, their victims.

---

[3]   Please note the difference in ages covered by the analysis used in this comparison. The Surveying Prisoners Crime Reduction Survey includes a sample of people aged 18 and over. The Annual Population Survey is a sample of people aged 16-64.

For some who were already members of a faith, the wider community played a prominent part in their thinking for the future and they had to address the expectations of their religion in evaluating their past behaviour and future (career) priorities.

For those with a lack of recent interaction with the labour market, it meant that there was a sense of speculation about their planning work beyond the gate. Others, especially those with businesses that still existed under caretaker management, had no such qualms and even for some others there was an assertion that they still understood how the world of work had moved on since their sentence began. While the entrepreneur group tended to be confident about the future, others were keenly aware of the challenges that awaited them on their release in an already tight labour market, and of them, some considered self-employment to be the way forward.

The rest of this chapter now focuses on each of the factors that affected our interviewees' career decision-making. The structure broadly follows the same format as applied to reporting the main stage findings in Chapters 3, 4 and 5. First we focus on internal influences on career decision-making and how an individual's career, work and learning identity and values can affect their career decision-making, before presenting the evidence about the external factors affecting decision-making and finally exploring how interviewees have made career decisions.

6.2 Internal factors affecting career decision-making

6.2.1 Career work and learning: identity and goals

Prior to their current prison sentence, the majority of the interviewees tended to describe their work histories (where they had them) as a series of events or episodes. Interviewees who had worked tended to have done so in a variety of sectors and jobs. Where interviewees had been employed, this was typically, but not exclusively, in low-skilled positions, such as bar work. One group of interviewees had fragmented work histories, with work interspersed with spells in prison and abuse of drugs and/or alcohol. There was little evidence of interviewees having a specific career goal or field of work in mind from a young age, most seemed to have worked in jobs that came their way, or to have been guided by other work values, such as the desire to manage their own business.

The following example illustrates the range of different types of work interviewees had engaged with - in this case, the running of several different businesses depending on the opportunities that arose:

> *'I've always been entrepreneurial, to be honest. When I was a kid I had my own gardening round when I was 10 or 12 and had two or three different paper jobs, window cleaning, car cleaning, buying sweets from the shop and selling them to my friends – for a bit of profit; the usual. I've always had an entrepreneurial side to me. From 22 onwards up until, let's say, 30 years old, I had cleaning companies – domestic, commercial. I've had garden furniture manufacturing companies and obviously we had market stalls, property. Ventured into property refurbishment for a couple of year, was in the food industry for four year*

operating…some of them at the same time, some overlapping. I saw an opportunity, I just used to jump on it.' (25-39, Level 3, male)

The fortunes of those who were self-employed and/or had their own businesses prior to prison were mixed and interviewees described rollercoaster experiences with several highs and lows. These included one interviewee who described how he made 'silly money' from his property development business on the back of the property boom, and another interviewee who was declared bankrupt and lost her home when her business failed. The extent, and at times precarious nature, of self-employment and business ownership seemed to have added to the sense of rapid change and uncertainty in many of the narratives.

Two prisoners described their previous careers in the armed forces. These experiences had impacted on their career identity and what they wanted from work when they left the forces:

'I grew up with the forces, kind of, undertone to everything. And that was not, if you like, a discipline point of view, it was also a mindset, which is perhaps different to a civilian mind-set. My grandfather always brought me up…he was entrepreneurial in his own right, he believed that if you wanted something you went out and worked for it.' (40+, Level 3, male)

'I came out of the forces, and the first thing I did was look for the comfort of a uniform again, so I went to security work.' (40+, Level 3, male)

Two other interviewees discussed the importance they had placed on money prior to their current spell in prison, and both had reflected during their time in prison that they had pursued money too strongly, at the expense of other values, as one interviewee described:

'And it's all about money, money, money... It was my world, and it revolved around me. It was not the other way round; I didn't see people, I just saw money. That's what I saw. And as long as it wasn't my family that was getting hurt by, perhaps, how I went about to financially get the money, legally, I didn't care.' (40+, Level 3, male)

Time in prison had given other interviewees the opportunity to reflect on what they wanted from work in the future, as well as giving some the chance to study for and gain relevant qualifications and work experience in new fields. In some cases, interviewees' time in prison had had no discernable impact on their career identity, but for others their achievements had created new work and employment options. For example, one interviewee had built on a previously developed interest in health and safety and was studying health and safety management at Level 3, and another who was studying a business management qualification discussed how he developed this work interest:

'What I'd like to do in the future is work for the Health and Safety Executive. … I've worked in industries; I've worked in paper mills, I've worked in foundries, I've worked in timber yards, I've worked in bakeries, and I've worked on the railway, which is probably one of the most dangerous environments I've ever worked in.' (40+, Level 3 working towards an OU degree, male)

'I bought a Financial Times newspaper. I loved all the numbers in it. I was like, wow, what does P to E mean? What does gross mean? What does [unclear] high/low mean? And I just wanted to understand it more, so I read the paper, got loads of books and just taught myself shares….And I thought, okay, what sort of career would enable me to do this? And it was financial adviser or go into actually a security trader, and I realised that it would be less likely for me to be a security trader because I'd have to go to top universities and know the right people. But it's easier to start being an independent financial adviser, so I thought, right, I'll do that.' (25-39, Level 3 with some OU credits, male)

The prison environment is designed to encourage prisoners to reflect on their lives and to move forward. All those we met had done this to a greater or lesser extent. The underpinning values varied from a desire to reconnect with their families to an almost evangelical discovery of an occupation that had not occurred to them previously.

Interviewees' future career identities ranged from primarily a lifestyle choice – with greatest emphasis on providing for children for example, through a service focus, such as in teaching, to a technical orientation where cooking, for example, had become a passion. They were looking for work to support their desired lifestyle as in the case of the female interviewee who simply wanted to *'enjoy her grandson'*. Another female interviewee wanted to go into administration preferably in her previous industry encouraged by the work she has done in the prison's drop-in centre. There also remained a strong sense of entrepreneurship among several interviewees. Prisoners were looking for a variety of things from work on their release. They included the opportunity to:

- learn from past mistakes – in work as well as from their offence itself

- provide for children and/or re-engage with their family

- put occupational and business visions into action

- be part of normal society

- provide a service to society

- get their business back on track, and

- be self-employed.

Some of the people we spoke to planned to return to their previous businesses, albeit with a significantly different attitude and, in most cases, with new knowledge and skills from the learning programmes that they had followed. For these people, career identity had not changed significantly. Others spoke about wanting to start businesses or to be self-employed. In addition to the entrepreneurial group, other plans included becoming a self-employed accountant or hairdresser and a fitness instructor. Some thought that they would become self-employed as this would make it easier for them to work with a criminal record. The following quotes illustrate interviewees' plans to work for themselves on release:

> *'I'm one of the fortunate ones …. because I still have my business and stuff behind me.'* (40+, Level 3, male)

> *'I read Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations. He talks about the labour or the labourer, and I didn't want to be a labourer, so I don't want to do a nine-to-five. I want to be flexible in my work. I want to be able to do work that I love, and that is entrepreneurship. I love it, so I think that is why I focused on that more.'* (18-24, Level 3, male)

> *'I'm hoping to progress to get to D CAT [a category D prison] to go to college to do my Level 3, because I want to open a restaurant, and I feel, when I'm cooking and I'm making food, it's like I'm rolling, and it's like a passion, and I love it.'* (25-39, Level 3 with plans to set up a restaurant, male)

The strength of career identity was most apparent in the entrepreneurs. This applied in the case of one female who was determined to return to self-employment as this gave her control over when and where she worked. This had enabled her to look after her daughter outside school hours. In other cases – and particularly those who had been drug abusers – career identity was felt to be subservient to the priorities of family and security upon release.

6.2.2   Personal circumstances: opportunities and constraints

Personal circumstances including relationships, housing, and personal finance form a key element of the career decision-making process for prisoners, both prior to prison and during their sentence. This is consistent with the seven or nine rehabilitation pathways for men and women respectively that are routinely used in prisons to ensure that all of a prisoner's needs are met (as illustrated in Figure A.1 in the Annex).

Family responsibilities and relationships

Family was important if not central, to every interviewee's narrative (see also section 6.3.2). In most cases, the interviewee had rejected their parents' values when they were young and followed another path. This commonly happened in secondary school accompanied by behaviour that led to exclusion. For example, despite being part of a strong family with a brother and two sisters, one female prisoner recalled how she had played truant from school. She was drawn to older people and drugs including heroin – a feature of her subsequent behaviour over many years.

In several of the narratives, there were stories of abusive relationships in the family home. Some cases involved witnessing domestic violence among their parents and others also included being abused themselves. Some of these interviewees went on to describe and analyse how they felt a history of violence in the family home had affected them, their choices, behaviour, decision and their relationships since. For example:

> *'I mean, underneath all that history of violence, and it is straight through childhood, so history of violence, got in the forces, and I'm just swapping one institution for another. From home, that was one type of institution, violence, and then I've gone to the forces where they say, it's all right to be violent. So then I've been let back out in civilian life, and I'm still the same person as when I went in the forces and got trained up, and come out, and I hadn't learnt any real, proper coping strategies…even though I got married and things slowed*

down, you have children, etc., etc., those traits were still there. And it takes a lot to actually really understand that you could smooth over the cracks, on the surface, but the underlying issues are the traits and beliefs that you've probably had about different things… And I'd never gone through those, and never unpicked them, and there was always the potential for a problem.' (40+, Level 3, male)

Prisoners' relationships with their families may be strained for many years but for the interviewees in our sample, close family ties could survive such tensions and become more harmonious after prisoners had shown that they were addressing their issues. For example:

'So the chaplain came to me…and he said your brother's dead. And my head just exploded .Yes, it just exploded, and I [sat] down with myself and I wrote a letter to my mum. And where do you start? Because you're writing to your mum to say hello, and she's going to see the address, you're in prison. And then you're going to say, somewhere in that letter, I'm sorry you buried your child. So the timing couldn't have been any worse. But anyway, mum wrote back, and she said she wanted to see me. And she came down to see me, and obviously, she [came] with my sister, and I hadn't seen my sister for a little while, as well… In fact, two and a half years.' (40+, Level 3, male)

A number of the interviewees had had children at a young age. For example, one woman was pregnant at 14 and another at 15. Several of the male interviewees were also fathers, including one who was a teenage father. In several instances, wider family were a source of support in bringing up children while the parent was in prison. One female prisoner had three children, two of whom who have been brought up by her mother and one by her sister (25-39, Level 1, female).

During their time in prison, interviewees reflected on their family relationships and the impact they had had on their behaviour, and values, and how these relationships fitted into their future. There were cases where parental guidance and example had a demonstrable impact on prisoners' approach to life and several expressed a desire to return to their parents' values. For others it was watching what other family members achieved that motivated them. For example, one female prisoner described how she drew strength from her son and daughter (who were 19 and 16 respectively at the time of her sentence) who have become successful in their chosen fields. Her son is involved in voluntary work with disadvantaged young people and is currently undertaking a business degree (40+, Level 3 with previous experience of degree level study, female).

In terms of partners' involvement in career decision-making, this did not form a prominent element of prisoners' narratives. That is not to say that their partners did not play a role, but prisoners expressed their plans in terms of their rehabilitation and the resources available to them in prison on an individual basis rather than as a household.

Physical and mental health and disability

Several of the interviewees had been long term users of drugs and/or alcohol. These addictions had affected and were likely to continue to affect their physical and mental

health. Of these, one was still under treatment and described her continuing dependency on drugs:

> *'The only reason I can talk to you now is because I have had my methadone. Without [it] I can't function….I suffer from mild schizophrenia and paranoia.'* (25-39, Level 1, female)

For her, moving from methadone to oral medicines would only take place after her release. The road to full recovery would take time and require ongoing treatment and support.

Others were still suffering the effects of their drug abuse and had developed significant health problems as a result. One female prisoner had overcome her drug habit but had then succumbed to alcoholism. Although the prison reports that she is making progress, her state of mind affected the interview, which was terminated. The prisoner was due for release within the next few months and was hoping to see her son whom she had not met for six years (40+, Level 1, female).

Other than drug and alcohol issues, interviewees in our sample did not mention any other serious health issues that would affect the type of work they could consider upon release or their career decision-making. However, several interviewees mentioned that they looked after their health and kept fit using the prison's gym facilities or by taking part in periodic runs around the site.

Life stage

There was a wide range of offending and sentencing patterns represented in the group. Several had been serial offenders through drug-related offences or other petty crime. Others were coming to the end of their first, lengthy, sentence and were still in their mid twenties. However only one prisoner raised the issue of life stage at interview saying that, as she was in her mid 30s she realised just how far behind her siblings she was in terms of achievement, security and relationships. As far as finding employment was concerned, she thought that her health and criminal record would be greater barriers than her age in finding employment.

Also worth noting was that some prisoners had well established businesses, had significant life and business experience and financial resources at their disposal.

6.2.3   Psychological orientation

There were striking examples of prisoners who had reached very positive states of mind during their sentences. They had been in very dark places initially but had managed to address their issues by various routes. Some had engaged with learning to help bring about this change in mindset (see section 6.2.4) and others had engaged with restorative justice.

Experiences of restorative justice differed in terms of victim response but the process of writing to the victims had been cathartic. Those letters could take months to write but in doing so, sensitivity to the plight of the victim was demonstrated.

The following examples illustrate the change in the psychological orientation of some of the interviewees following their time in prison:

'I was sat then in a telephone conference with probation ….. and I asked them about doing restorative justice, when I can meet my victim and say I'm sorry, and they suggested, well, you can write him a letter, and I said "okay, I'll write him a letter". I think it took me about seven, eight… seven and a half to eight months to write a letter. I had to think about what I had to write, and think, and reflect on the impact I caused, and I'm sure I caused, not just him, his family, and my family, and my girlfriend and her parents, and my son, at the time. I hurt a lot of people.' (25-39, Level 3 with plans to set up a restaurant, male)

'It probably sounds really clichéd, this, but part of that light bulb moment was me coming to terms with what I'd done. I read the victim statement, and it wasn't good at all. And I wanted to apologise and try to engage in restorative justice and what have you, and understandably [I] did to an extent and then they didn't [want to]. So it didn't go ahead, and so I didn't get to apologise or express my remorse, and I just understand that's their decision, whether they want to hear that from me or not, but I still felt and feel as though I do have a debt to society. I do owe society, and I have to say that does seem clichéd, but I do actually feel that. And I believe that the... I could stand on the corner of the street apologising for the rest of my life. That's not going to do anything.' (18-24, Level 4 with credits towards an OU degree, male)

It is also worth noting here that a number of interviewees in this sample displayed 'risky' behaviours of some sort. These obviously included the behaviours and actions that led to their offence, but also risky drug and alcohol behaviours, and to some extent to 'risk' of being self-employed or being responsible for and managing their own business. There seems to have been more evidence of risk-taking among this sample of interviewees when compared to those in the main stage interviewed for this research.

The following pen portrait illustrates one prisoner's journey towards finding a more positive psychological orientation, development of different values and priorities and how this affected their future career decision-making, making him more aware of his interests and preferences.

A pen portrait of change in a prisoner's decision-making approach

A prisoner in his early forties described a life that started in a chaotic and physically abusive household. He had three brothers and three sisters. Two brothers and one sister died at a young age and one brother died more recently. On leaving school he went to college and then joined the Territorial Army (TA) at 17 as an infantryman, liking it so much that he joined the Royal Air Force (RAF) Regiment as a guided missile operator. His service included tours in Northern Ireland and Iraq.

On his return from Iraq, he met his first wife and left the RAF as a result. Seeking to retain a service related work-style, he became a uniformed security guard. At the same time he volunteered helping people with disabilities. Inspired by this voluntary work, he started a part-time GNVQ course in social work whilst continuing to work in the security industry. He had moved on to door supervisory work and became a team leader, managing 50 staff.

At this point he moved his family on account of his father-in-law's illness and moved to sales work becoming a manager of an insurance sales team. He was never out of work and attributed his high work ethic to his parents. His mother had had several clothing factories. He then moved into data communications (satellite dish and CCTV) installation work alongside the insurance work. At this point the family decided to move abroad where he quickly established a data communications installation business which ran for two years until his marriage broke down.

The family returned to East Anglia where he returned to data communications work and he married again. It was at this point he committed an offence. On reflection he feels that the violence of his childhood, compounded by being in the armed forces, had never been resolved and his actions had been exacerbated by the loss of his siblings, getting married a second time too quickly and working too hard. Reflecting on his behaviour he said:

'I lacked patience. That was one of the main things with me. I couldn't be patient. To sit here? No chance. I lacked patience, I lacked compassion, I lacked understanding for anything. It was… I was very egocentric. It was my world, and it revolved around me. It was not the other way round; I didn't see people, I just saw money.'

He has used his prison sentence to reflect on his life, actions and priorities. He identified the caring side of his nature as expressed in his GNVQ and voluntary work as being founded in the relationship he has with his sister. He also sought personal stability and peace and found it through Buddhism.

From this platform he has built his qualifications including healthy relationships, health trainer training, life skills coaching, Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS) and an Open University degree. He felt that the social work phase in his career had been buried under the drive to make money and provide for his family. He felt he was now more aware of his true interests and priorities and is making the best use of his time in prison. He is supporting fellow prisoners to address their behaviours and learn to read and write and this gives him great satisfaction. Looking to the future

he has a plan, with a friend, to establish a data communications business on a part-time basis as he ideally wants to teach in further education. Based on his experiences of working with fellow prisoners and his new awareness of values and priorities, teaching has become his passion.

6.2.4   Education, qualifications and skills

In this section we will consider the interviewees' education, skills and qualifications. Several interviewees reported that they had poor experiences of school, with experiences of exclusion not uncommon, and they typically had low or no qualifications from compulsory schooling. Most of the interviewees in our sample left education at the first available opportunity, although one went onto college to study plumbing. However, he had to leave his course early when his partner became pregnant:

> *'I did a year on it and then I went into full-time employment…this is a decision which I could look back on, but at the time I was obviously in a position where I needed more finance in my life.'* (25-39, Level 3, male)

Rather than through study, it was common for interviewees to develop their skills through work and there were examples of interviewees who had taken vocationally-related courses. However, for most interviewees, it was the learning opportunities in the prison environment that had really helped to further their educational achievement. There was evidence that current learning provision helped prisoners to work towards their career goals, in addition to enhancing basic skills where appropriate. Although some interviewees did not take as many courses as they could have, feeling that, as successful people in their own businesses, they did not need more education or vocational courses, others were keen to take opportunities:

> *'Because of what they offer in prison, I'm grabbing it with both hands. There are people in prison, I think, that said "no, I don't care; I'll still get out". And then what are you achieving? You'll get back out where you're not doing anything to progress, or you've not done anything to change your behaviour, and you're going to get out and you're going to go back to prison. You need to help yourself to change, because your family don't want to see you in that prison for the rest of your life. I know that they don't want to see me in that prison. That's why I've done what I've done to change my ways, change my actions, my behaviour, my thinking.'* (25-39, Level 3, male)

Among those who had undertaken learning, the selection of courses in prison was not always related to future career options or with a specific work goal in mind. Some interviewees wanted to undertake any learning opportunity that was offered to them. One prisoner said that he had achieved 52 qualifications during his lengthy sentence and is now aiming to teach in further education after his release following the completion of an Open University degree. A female offender has passed a British Institute of Cleaning Science qualification and has a forklift truck licence. She has gained Level 2 maths and English, achieved a basic painting and decorating certificate and is working with Shelter helping other prisoners with housing issues. Her priority is to enjoy being with her family and she will look for any suitable job when she returns to her home area.

Others had developed their career ideas as a result of their learning and were looking to develop new work identities on their release, as one respondent explained:

> *'I've got an NVQ in catering. That's Level 1 and 2. I'm hoping to progress to get to D CAT [a category D prison] to go to college to do my Level 3, because I want to open a restaurant, and I feel, when I'm cooking and I'm making food, it's like I'm rolling, and it's like a passion, and I love it.'* (25-39 Level 3, previously a motor mechanic, with plans to set up a restaurant, male)

Others tried to find and enrol on courses that were well-matched to their likely future work identities. In the example below, the interviewee had taken courses to support two career aims; a personal trainer qualification and a programme leading to an Institute of Leadership and Management qualification.

> *'I was trying to get the practical side around me, which was the personal training. I thought, well, I was looking for it five year ago and this has landed on my lap so I'm in prison, obviously it's something that's meant to be, in a sense. That's the way I see things. So then I wanted business knowledge behind me so I can apply that to my own self-employment.'* (25-39, Level 3, male)

Another had qualified as a personal financial adviser and was completing the second year of an Open University degree. He recognised the funding issues around higher level courses and acknowledged that some people outside of a prison context would struggle to afford higher education:[4]

> *'I think they've got to justify the fact that they can't be giving someone £6,000 a year to do one course or to do a year's worth of study when they're in prison, when there's people outside who are struggling to do the equivalent, and they've committed no crime'.* (18-24, Level 4 with credits towards an OU degree, male)

The prisoners understood and articulated the limited learning choices available to them given budgetary constraints. Limitations applied to course places and this could lead to a delay before a prisoner could start a course of his or her choice, by which time they may be on another programme. There were also examples of timetable conflicts between a course that a prisoner wanted to take and the priorities of prison staff, such as between a behaviour modification programme and a vocational course. It could also take a significant period of time for prisoners to be able to start the course they wanted, and they could be limited by the offers available in their prison. There were also some cases of issues with the continuity of learning following moves between prisons. There was also some evidence that prisoners felt the learning options available to them were restricted, and they had to 'fight' and 'make a case' if they wanted to access training that was not 'typical'. In general

---

[4] Prior to 2012, funding support for Open University (OU) Higher Education (HE) courses for prisoners in England was provided by the Prisoners' Education Trust and/or the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills via the OU. In line with changes to HE funding, eligible prisoners starting HE courses on or after 1 September 2012 are able to apply for Government-backed student loans to meet the full cost of their tuition costs.

though, learning had been a positive force within the prison experience of most of the interviewees, and had given them more knowledge, skills and qualifications to use in the labour market upon their release.

6.3 External factors affecting career decision-making

6.3.1 Labour market opportunities and constraints

As noted earlier, those with labour market experience in our sample tended to have found it relatively easy in the past to find work, and several had (family) networks they used in order to find work (see section 6.3.2). Some interviewees described how the economic climate had impacted on their labour market experiences. Compare the contrasting experiences of on interviewee with his own businesses working during an economic boom and those of another interviewee during a period of labour market contraction:

> *'With it being the 2000s…everything you were touching was turning to gold so my experiences were generally good so I kept making money off one thing and I jumped onto another thing and it just kept on expanding and expanding and expanding.'* (25-39, Level 3, male)

> *'When work had dried up in the past I went back to crime. … I had plenty work on with him, and then he folded, he moved away. It was hard to find any more work. I was getting sniffs of work, that's when I went back into crime really.'* (40+, Level 3, male)

Most older interviewees felt confident about the labour market opportunities that would be available to them on their release, although many favoured self-employment and/or returning to their own businesses rather than seeking work as an employee. In some cases, interviewees reported that the cyclical nature of self-employment had contributed to their offending behaviour. When things were difficult, it was easier to fill the income gap with criminal activity.

Younger people with little or no experience of employment felt uncertain of finding work unless they became self-employed. The entrepreneurs amongst the 15 interviewees did not have concerns about the labour market, and were more focused upon simply needing to be able to make a profit. The two aspiring businessmen in the sample would be entering their markets under difficult trading conditions with little experience and felt they would benefit from access to business mentoring services in order to support them to do this.

When prisoners were asked about where they would find out about job opportunities they mentioned the local press and Jobcentre Plus. Of those who were about to be released some were expecting a National Probation Service funded agency, such as the NOMS and European Social Fund co-funded Achieve North West project, to provide support and information. None mentioned the NCS in this regard. Their understanding of the labour market primarily came through their networks and where they were interested in a new occupation they did not seem to have researched it or possible opportunities very thoroughly.

6.3.2   Social and other career resources

Family, friends and wider networks

There was some discussion about the people who had helped inform and support interviewees prior to their time in prison – helping to inform them about choices and supporting them to make decisions about work and learning. These sources included family, friends, partners and wider influences including teachers and school careers advisers. In the main, these sources were helpful and were perceived to exert a positive influence. For example, one prisoner spoke of the strong support from his family, particularly his granddad, who brought him up after his parents divorced (at an early age), and how he had been a good stabilising influence who wanted the best for his grandson:

> *'I knew what was right and what was wrong. I was never smacked by my granddad, but his word was law, and I never feared him, but God, I respected him... he didn't teach me anything, he taught me to learn…He never tried to force me, or even try to convince me that the kind of career he'd had was better than anybody else, but he would have liked me to make the most of any opportunities that had been given to me. And I got a job in a warehouse. And I was talking to him one day, and he said "well, yes, but", he said "if you want to, the choice is yours, but you can do better than that". And I said "granddad, I'm quite happy with what I'm doing". And he said "yes, but look at the talent you've got". And then I said to him, and this is the one occasion I got one up on him; I said "granddad, you've got a toolbox in your garage". He went, "yes". I said "have you got a screwdriver in there?" He said "yes". I said "do you always use it?" He said "no". I said "but it's there when you need it". And he sort of went, okay, son. And that was the way I saw things. He gave me a skill base, and the nice thing about that skill base was, it was a board which you could hang things on. It was like a coat hook or coat board. He gave me the hooks and said, there you go, mate, you hang things on there as you proceed through life. And I like that kind of… I wouldn't even call it teaching. It's more of a… I don't know what you'd call it. It's a guiding.'* (40+, Level 3, male)

Other examples include a husband influenced by the concerns of his wife, and an interviewee who was nudged by a careers adviser when he left school:

> *'I met my first wife. After I'd come back from the Gulf, I met my first wife, and got together. She obviously didn't want me to be in the Forces. I can't blame her; who wants to be a Force's wife, really? It's a lonely existence at times. And so I came out and I settled in [town]. And we had two children. My daughter's 21 now, and my son's 16.'* (40+, Level 3, male)

> *'I left school when I was 16, and in what would have been the summer holiday of the last year at school, I was outside in the garden …It was like the August time, when the summer holiday… I was out in the front garden doing the weeding and a car pulled up outside the house, and there was a woman there, and she was the careers adviser from school. And she said "hello [name]". I went "hello, Miss [name]". She said "is your mum in?" I went "well, no, she's out at the moment". Oh. So she stood there outside having a little chat with me, and she said "how would you fancy working, or getting a job?" I went "yes". As I say, I was only 16. She said about this Youth Opportunities Programme, and how would I fancy doing that? So I said, "yes".'* (40+, Level 3, male)

This same interviewee also spoke of the influence of an army recruiter who said he wasn't physically strong enough to do the job he had set his heart on, and how he felt that he wanted to prove him wrong:

> *'I applied to join the air force. So I went to the recruitment selection centre, and I wanted to be a naval fireman or an air force fireman. And there was a bloke there, one of the selection officers, and he was, like, 18 stone, built like a brick *******, and he sat on the floor, and I was five stone dripping wet. He said "pick me up and put me on that table". I couldn't pick his shadow up. And he gave me a kind of wakeup call; he said "look, son, come back in a couple of years' time when you've filled out a little bit". I was absolutely trashed. He might as well have just shot me. I was finished…. It shattered me. Anyway, I walked off and sulked, and come back home and my granddad was like "how did you get on, kid?" And I was in bits. And he went "oh, you know, that's part of growing up, kid. You don't get everything you want". Anyway, so I started working in the barracks, and I thought… If you like, it was almost an arrogance, to prove this recruitment sergeant wrong, I'll join the army. So I applied to join the engineers, and I went through all my selection for the engineers, and I was accepted for the Royal Engineers.'* (40+, Level 3, male)

Several interviewees talked about how their families had helped them to get work. Some actually worked with their families, in established family businesses or in businesses that they had set up in partnership with family members. One interviewee talked about how he invested with his family in a sea-side fish and chip restaurant; another spoke of how she opened a hairdressing salon with her sister-in-law and later went to work for her father in his leisure and fitness company; and a third mentioned that he had started up a business with his older brother before setting up on his own.

Some interviewees also talked about the negative influences of peers on their choices and decisions, and how they influenced key decisions that led them into criminal activity. For example, one interviewee spoke of the bad influence of friends and relationships she had which led to her drug problems.

Several interviewees, particularly those with a strong entrepreneurial focus and often varied work experiences, had developed strong networks during their early careers (prior to prison). These networks included friends of friends, former work colleagues, employers and business clients. These networks had helped them to consider new options, find out about work or business opportunities and to secure work.

Wider networks and even chance encounters were particularly influential for one individual. He talked about how his work in a bingo hall brought him into contact with a wider social network of individuals and how they inspired him to change career direction and to do voluntary work with people with learning disabilities. He also talked about how a chance conversation at work had led him to consider another occupation, to capitalise on his forces experience and work in door security. The networks he had built when he moved to Spain helped him to get work for his satellite installation business, and the networks he had in the UK had helped him find work when he returned home after his married broke down.

'Getting work when I came back was not a problem. Before I left Spain, I'd phoned one of my old bosses I used to contract for, and I said "if I came back tomorrow, could I have a job again, contracting?" And he goes "if you come back now, I've got a van for you". So that wasn't a problem. So I literally got off the plane, the next day, after we'd settled back, I went straight back to work, to get some income back in again.' (40+, Level 3, male)

Another interviewee talked about how he developed good social networks whilst in work, in the army and then working for the railways. These were very important to him, they have influenced him in considering different work options and directions, and have helped him to cope with labour market changes and pressures, and remain in work:

'I started working on the railway. And originally, I was a guard … and I started learning to drive trains …And then I failed my driving test the first time, on the train, and I was doing it again, and then of course they privatised the railway. So a lot of us were looking at being made redundant…And I went and spoke to my foreman on the railway to find out what was going…whereabouts we all stood, and obviously it was all in the air because they were in the process of privatising it…And my foreman said "leave it with me, I'll make a few enquiries and see what we can do". Because you look after your own in that kind of job.' (40+, Level 3, male)

When in prison, the social resources available obviously change. In some ways, they were more restricted than those available to main stage respondents given their circumstances, although they were able to access services within the prison. When in prison, family and friends remained a source of information, advice and support for dealing with their period in custody and particularly when making plans for their release. For some individuals, fellow prisoners were also a source of support.

For example, one interviewee talked about the general help and support of a fellow prisoner who introduced him to spirituality; and another talked of the support of his father-in-law in reaching his longer-term goals:

'If I hadn't, and I'll be honest; if I hadn't found Buddhism in prison, if I hadn't found my first Buddhist minister, this man with a never-ending smile that I seemed to think there was something wrong with him, he was so happy; he had a smile it's like, what have you got to be so happy about? We're in prison. If I hadn't found [name] at that time…I would have been dead, I would have killed myself in prison.' (40+, Level 3, male)

'My girlfriend's dad runs his own business, so I think I've got to ask him questions. I've got a whole lot of questions to ask, so when I do get out I want to meet [him] with some questions.' (25-39, Level 3 with plans to set up a restaurant, male)

For those with networks, these also played a key role in their longer-term goals and their plans for when they leave prison, helping them to line up work or business opportunities. These networks could extend to the wider community (and were particularly important to some faith groups). These networks could also be developed in prison, and existing networks could be nurtured if prisoners were allowed out for visits or work:

'I also have another opportunity for a guy who works on the railways, a place called [name] and they've got this contract … He used to work with me as well on a lighting business that we had and he's now construction manager. He said "I need you down here with me so study the project management and come down here when you get out and we'll get massive – because I'm making serious money"… my opportunities are evolving each and every day because now I'm getting home I'm seeing all the business associates who have now opened doors for themselves so now they're coming to me and asking me, would I like to venture up with them or would I like to go and work for them?' (25-39, Level 3, male)

'I've been fortunate enough to come up with a fantastic idea, meet another person in prison and another person outside who love the idea, have bought into the idea and want to take it forward. And I have actually managed to speak to professionals – other business-people – who love the idea and actually want to take it forward.' (18-24, Level 3, male)

Some interviewees also receive strong support from their communities, despite their disapproval of their crimes. In one case, the prisoner is a businessman, managing the family businesses and so knows what he will do when he is released. The other will return to catering in the Bangladeshi community and will manage a restaurant until he is able to regain his taxi licence.

Formal support during prison

Much of the support for work and learning decisions (and how to cope with prison) came from prison and agency staff and, to some extent, from other prisoners (as noted above). Prisoners can access informal advice from prison or external provider staff more or less on demand, and certainly at short notice. Several interviewees mentioned staff that had helped them, especially at testing times. The close proximity and frequent contact with prison and agency staff meant that providing a gentle nudge or safe place to discuss options was a natural process within the establishment community.

One interviewee talked about a key piece of advice given to him by an officer when he was first in prison that has influenced his actions and thinking whilst in prison:

'When I first…or not long after I first came to prison, an officer, again, it was like, sort of, father to son type thing, but it was because when you first come to prison, they sit you down after you've been sentenced, and they tell you "right, here's the way things are". It's a wake-up, a realisation. .. He said "whatever you do, get anything you can out of this" … What he said to me was "the bigger waste of time than you being here would be if you go out with nothing". He said "take everything you can from this place". He said "for example, on the out, you might not have time to study with the OU because you've got a family with 2.4 kids and a Mondeo…I've got nothing. I have not [got] restraints at that". He said, "make it count". And that's one piece of advice I was given a long time ago by somebody in a uniform, which made sense…. He said "if you don't come out of here with a lot of qualifications, you are a fool". And he was right. Make the most of it. And I will.' (40+, Level 3, male)

Another talked about the general support of the prison staff in helping him get onto appropriate courses, stay optimistic and get ready for his release:

'…well, when I came to prison and I heard about this course, called ARV, called Alcohol Related Violence, which looks at the beliefs of why you did it, your actions,… and traps you used to fall into. I spoke to an officer [name], and he got me moved to the wing where they did the courses…the wing staff have helped me through the courses.' (25-39, Level 3, male)

A third also talked about how the prison staff had helped him get onto a college course:

'When I first come here, people were going out to college, so I enquired about doing the college course in cooking. And at first it was hard to find a college that would take prisoners, and this college that I'm at now needed a bit of persuasion, obviously. I had to go and have an interview and tell them what I'm in for, and they did their own risk assessment on me, and finally let me in. But it took me five months for them... to persuade them. But that's not me, this is the other people in the prison. The careers people here are phoning them every day. So eventually they said yes. And they haven't regretted it. I've always kept to my timetable, never done anything wrong. So I just think they don't want the other people in the college to know I'm a prisoner.' (25-39, Level 3, male)

Indeed with the wide ranging and often complex challenges faced by prisoners, some felt a need for access to people with in-depth knowledge of careers – and particularly for face-to-face support. The NCS was well located in each prison, in the education department, the prison's Drop-In centre and the Activities Centre respectively. In addition, almost all prisons now have Virtual Campus (VC), a secure intranet that supports and enhances delivery of learning and skills provision to learners in custody. It includes restricted access to approved sites thus facilitating applications to jobs through the gate. However, there were significant differences in the profile of the careers service in each establishment visited. In one prison, the careers adviser was fully engaged with the rest of the departmental team and highly regarded by those prisoners that mentioned her. She had a more or less open door policy which was appreciated by staff and prisoners. In another prison an interviewee had seen the careers adviser but could not remember what was discussed. Across all prisons visited, the VC did not appear to have a high profile with prisoners.

Some interviewees were positive about and grateful for the careers support they had receive including one individual who was full of praise for the NCS support whilst in prison. He felt this guidance process had helped him to construct a realistic plan and long and short-term goals for the remainder of his sentence and for the future.

However others had some (small) criticisms. One interviewee who was planning to set up in business with others had difficulties accessing advice about business start-ups and accessing finance; and another felt he had difficulties getting access to appropriate training as much of the guidance was aimed at those with lower level skills, experiences and ambitions:

'You tend... well, I've tried to speak to people in prison, but there's only so much information you can get. In terms of resources for setting up... informational

resources for setting up a business in prison... limited at best. I think it's lacking so much…You're just left to your own devices….But then again, I don't know. It may be that is a good thing, the fact that you're left to your own devices, because it probably sifts out the wheat from the chaff. Because to set up and run your own business, you need to be persistent, and you can't have someone telling you what to do all the time, so maybe that is necessary. Maybe that's just the nature of being an entrepreneur.' (18-24, Level 3, male)

'When I was trying to get on these business courses; do you want to be a plumber? Well, no, I don't want to be a plumber, no. Do you want to go and do an IT course? No, I want to do this business course? Well, why? I explained why so obviously there was a bit of a wall but I think of this as a challenge for me to get over and that tests me maybe, I don't know…Obviously, in relation to the guidance situation, it should be more oriented to the person and that person's needs instead of saying, right, we've got X amount of funding for fork-lift truck drivers, go and do that, you'll get a job, you'll get a minimum-pay job when you get out…. I don't think anyone could have structured what I wanted to do. I knew what I wanted to do and to be honest, these have been really, really accommodating, to be quite fair, only once I've, like you said, been tenacious in what I want to do and determined….I think they've recognised it and helped me on my way, to be fair, and everything I've asked for since, they've helped me. They do their best… You get frustrated and there's these walls which you obviously need to break down or whatever you need to do because of the pigeon-hole scenario, basically, which does happen. ….I'm directing myself but they're also accommodating, like I say, assisting me on my way. It'd have been nice a while back saying, I need to do this, why don't we look at this, look at that, look at that. But at the time that wasn't possible. Sometimes it's better for you to find your own way.' (25-39, Level 3, male)

Prisons provide support to Release on Temporary License (ROTL) and Category D prisoners to enter employment using voluntary agencies and employers. However some commented on how difficult it is to find even temporary work at present, and one interviewee felt that the prison could do more to help prisoners get employment:

'They don't vet the jobs for you, so you ring up and say "oh, have you got any jobs?" And they're like, "yes, we've got jobs". And then they say, "have you got a contact number", and you tell them you're from the prison, and they're like, "oh, phone back". You phone back and the jobs are gone. But I think careers should do their part where they go through the list and phone the people and say, "prisoners will be ringing for this role, is that okay?" And they don't. Because the jobs are all saying, "oh, apply by internet", but we don't have internet, so we can't apply for it. So it's just... they're saying that they're going to make everyone an internet room that we can come and use, but......' (25-39, Level 3, male)

The pen portrait below illustrates how one prisoner was deciding between various employment opportunities and had sought advice and support from others in order to help him think through a way forward on his release.

An example of a prisoner deciding between various employment opportunities

The interviewee had demonstrated an entrepreneurial side from an early age with several jobs running at the same time including paper rounds, window and car cleaning and re-selling sweets. Initially his work career was conventional. Leaving school with GCSE grades C, D and E, he did the first year of a two year NVQ course in plumbing at a local college. He left to work for an electronics company on the production line when his partner became pregnant. After about two years, he left to work as an advertising representative for circuses, returning home at weekends. Subsequently his marriage broke down.

At this point, the prisoner returned to his entrepreneurial instincts and for the next eight years until the age of 30, he ran a series of companies focused on cleaning, garden furniture manufacturing, property refurbishment and market stalls. He commented that, '*I saw an opportunity and used to jump on it. Sometimes my tenacity could have been better….'.*

He was operating instinctively, with no business plans, and learning as he went along. At 28 he was married with a family arriving in due course. Two years later he invested in a fish and chip restaurant. The business developed rapidly and well, gaining awards and attracting investment. The situation changed significantly with a doubling of rent. The company was bankrupt and at that point the offence was committed.

Since being in prison he has been very active, opening up a number of possible future work options. He is now qualified as a gym instructor at Level 3. Apart from his personal interest in fitness, the attraction would be that he could be a freelance personal trainer. He has also worked on his management skills with an Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) course at a local college and an accountancy course at the same venue. The ILM course has been invaluable in showing how to work with teams. He was also planning to start a second Open University course in the summer of 2013.

He now reflected that had he understood management more thoroughly, he would not have made some of the mistakes that he did before his offence. He now has a number of opportunities opening up, especially through friends that he sees on home visits. These include project management on the railway and with a construction company in addition to the personal trainer option.

As a result he has talked to many prison and agency staff, including the NCS. He felt that people should not be prejudiced or assumptive in helping people to think about their career. He felt that some people had assumed that he would return to plumbing, whereas he felt that his life story and achievements indicate that he is focused more on interpersonal skills, be it as a personal trainer or a project manager. Overall, he was satisfied with the support he received. It is clear that his relationship with advice and guidance staff is close, continuing and has developed over time. He felt they know he is motivated and support his plans with suggestions on adjustments as necessary.

6.3.3   Social influences: opportunities and constraints

Family was one of the strongest themes running through the interviews, and family features in most prisoners' stories as an influencing force. However the influence of family is felt in significantly different ways. One common but not universal thread in the interviews was the power of family norms and ethics to influence children over decades; and how family could continue to have an influence even after prolonged periods of non-contact (eg following years of rejection). Several interviewees talked of how they came from 'normal', 'traditional' and stable backgrounds with high moral values and how this (should have) set them on the right path and instilled in them a respect for learning and a work ethic.

For example, one interviewee felt that his mother had been very supportive around his early learning/education*:*

> *'My education was very good at the beginning. I went to a mediocre infant school, I'd say, but before that my mum was really, really... she focused on education a lot. She held it in high regard, and she'd teach me at home.'* (18-24, Level 3, male)

Another talked about his need to keep working, and the range of jobs he did prior to his prison sentence, which he felt was instilled in him at an early age from his parents:

> *'I've never once signed on. … Work ethic. I suppose, my parents never signed on. They always worked. I grew up in a shop. My parents always had a shop. When they'd stopped running the shop from home, it was their home premises, mum then went on to be a seamstress, so she had a few factories in the Midlands, herself. Dad worked for [employer].'* (40+, Level 3, male)

Sometimes the family influence extended to decisions about career paths. Here interviewees talked about expectations to follow in family footsteps or to work in family businesses. For example, one interviewee from a Bangladeshi background was expected to join his father's restaurant as a chef. Another spoke of the family tradition of being in the forces, and how from an early age he wanted to follow in his (estranged) father's footsteps to be a fireman in the forces, how he lived in the forces community, did work experience working in a barracks, and both his uncles were in the forces too:

> *'[Uncle 1] and [Uncle 2]. [Uncle 1] was in the air force, and my [Uncle 2] was in the navy. So I grew up with a forces, kind of, undertone to everything. And that was not just, if you like, a discipline point of view, it was also a mind-set, which is perhaps different to a civilian mind-set.'* (40+, Level 3, male)

However there were cases where children rebelled against their parents whilst still at school; in one case the interviewee became pregnant at 14 and left home, living at her grandmother's bar. Whilst she was there she started using drugs and went to prison for the first time. Another prisoner was expelled from school at 13 and sent to a care home as she was mixing with older groups of people. Both women were heavily involved with drugs for approaching 20 years.

There were also examples of family being a negative influence, by being poor role models or overly controlling. One prisoner described how as children he and his siblings were

ruled '*with a rod of iron'* and kept indoors. As a result he stayed at school as much as he could*: 'school was my coping strategy,… I wasn't let out in society. I didn't have any friends outside of the house, so the only thing I knew was home and school. So that's where I sought my solace'* (40+, Level 3, male)*.* Another spoke of how his mother remarried and his new step-father was not a positive influence and was into criminal activity and the interviewee felt it rubbed off on him. A third talked of how he felt his father favoured his brother so suffered from a lack of confidence, and never really felt he fitted in to the family.

Interviewees frequently spoke of the negative influence of peers and some partners during their early years and how they had *'got in with the wrong crowd'* who were often drug users and/or engaged in criminal activity.

Whilst in prison, families appeared to be a source of strength and inspiration, as well as a source of practical support. One interviewee talked about how her family is now an important driver, she felt that her priorities have changed and she wants to be able to enjoy time with her son and grandson. Another spoke of drawing strength and inspiration from her family – specifically her son and daughter, both of whom are successful in their chosen fields. Her son is involved in voluntary work with disadvantaged young people and is currently working towards a business degree. A third talked about how although she had a difficult relationship with her parents, they and her sister have fostered her children whilst she has been in prison, and that in-between periods of custody she was able to stay with her brother. She also described how although she was not able to be reconciled with her father before he died, she is now in regular contact with her mother, as her mother recognises her motivation/conviction to change direction; and how her family has played a key role in her desire to change. She feels inspired by her eldest son's determination to make a positive contribution to the charitable sector.

Indeed, considerations of family (and sometimes wider community) appeared to drive reflection with interviewees talking of letting their families/communities down. These considerations tended to lead interviewees to want to change, and to use their time in prison wisely, as the following example illustrates:

> *'It's cost me, it's cost me everything, it's cost me a lot, to be honest, and my family. It's not the money, my family is heartbroken. I've got a little girl there; honestly, it breaks my heart every time I leave her. I see her every two weeks, I've seen her today, and she's like that, she's round my neck, she's at that age now. It's a good job she doesn't understand, she still doesn't understand properly, but lucky enough, I'm in a place now where I get to see her, I get home to see her, seven weeks time I'll be sitting with her on the settee and I'm rolling around on the floor.'* (40+, Level 3, male)

Peers could continue to be a negative influence whilst inside, which could dampen the desire to change and improve. As one interviewee said:

> *'At first, when I first came in, I didn't make the most of it. I was aware of some of the things I could achieve, but, again, I was young, and you don't tend to want to pursue them as much. Your peers influence you more than, basically, your goals in life. So my first two years, I didn't really do much. I followed what the*

prison would set out, so do your Level 1s, do your Level 2s – this, that and the other. But I'd say about five years ago, I actually started to make a decision, or realise my situation, basically, in society.' (18-24, Level 3, male)

Making the most of one's time inside appeared to be a sub-culture within prison, as was engaging in learning and giving something back/supporting other prisoners. Many individuals were encouraged to gain key skills and qualifications, starting with literacy and numeracy, as well as skills relating to their offences (eg dealing with drugs and alcohol dependency, and how to have healthy relationships). Several interviewees talked about the support they provide to other prisoners, either help when they first arrive, pastoral support, help with basic skills, or help with housing. Prisoners work as peer mentors, outreach orderlies, Listeners, trainers, drugs/solvent abuse counsellors; and one interviewee talked of how she hopes to publish a self-help manual for prisoners. This support work was very important to the interviewees involved:

'Some of them just, I try to help a lot when they come here, I know a lot of people and I say, listen man, chill out, you'll get there, everybody's uptight…. I was a drug worker in the last prison, I was a mentor for [prison], I was a good one. I used to help them,... they get in cell packs and stuff, a lot of the lads are illiterate, they can't read and write, they used come in asking questions and get the answers and I'd write them down with them and help them progress through their certificates.' (25-39, Level 3, male)

'I've taken nine guys raw, who don't know nothing about health, know nothing about the department of health, know nothing about the structure from the government, white paper, etc., and bring them along gradually, gradually over a 10 week period, to being health trainers within this community in [prison]. So they're going to have clients who they see one to one over a six weeks basis, and basically, leave some kind of legacy behind. So that's been good; I've seen a few guys graduate here. I've been through an inordinate amount of clients myself, here, and I've made some profound changes to the way people think, and their attitudes, their behaviours. And it impacts on the rest of their lives, as well. Helped a lot of guys to read and write, and that's just great.' (40+, Level 3, male)

6.4 Career decision-making

The prison environment provides a focus on self reflection and this space had resulted in several interviewees reconsidering their values and priorities, both with what they wanted from work in the future and much more broadly in terms of how to rebuild family relationships and to live their lives in the future. Whilst the context may be very different from most people's experience, prisoners are balancing the same types of issues as the main stage population, although they may be more constrained in their circumstances and opportunities and may place greater emphasis on some of the factors influencing career decision-making, such as the consequences of drug addiction. There could be argued a loose parallel between the resettlement pathways (see section 1.2) and factors influencing career decision-making presented in this report (as illustrated in Figure A.1 in the Annex); both illustrate the changing priorities – and emotions – that people evaluate when making

career decisions. See the Annex for further detail about how the two map. Comparisons between the main stage and prisoner samples are discussed further in Chapter 7.

All the interviewees described a series of events that led them to reflect on themselves, their situation and their priorities. These could be triggered by an unexpected event, such as bereavement, but most commonly it was a gradual process with several interlinking factors affecting how the individual felt about their circumstances, past behaviour and future.

One female interviewee had battled drink and drugs, including a heroin addiction for more than twenty years, and had had spells in and out of prison. She described several strands to her decision to change her drug-taking behaviour in future, including the process of grieving for her father (who refused to see her before he died because of her drug habit and because she was in prison); her three year old son talking about the equipment his father uses to inject drugs and his increasing resistance to being with him; seeing her eldest son's contribution to work in the charitable sector and seeing what her brother and sister have achieved at work in the time she has been batting drug addiction. She has also recently had health complications resulting from her years of drug addiction. Her resolve was primarily to free herself from her addiction and she did not articulate a specific career goal for the future. Her experience was common with others with long-term drug addictions, who tended to be heavily constrained in terms of their thinking about work and learning.

Another interviewee described the things that led him to re-evaluate his past behaviour, offending and his future, and religion in particular had a role in shifting his sense of direction:

> 'The shift came about in 2009 when my brother died. That's when that hit me like a lead balloon. I hadn't spoken to my parents after the breakup of my first marriage….Me being in prison and my brother dying, yes. Because my sisters, that's the only brother they've got left. So it's a lot better than it used to be. So it definitely healed a few wounds, so to speak. But underpinning some of that shift, and the willingness to change, on my part, it still goes back to Buddhism, because if I didn't have my Buddhist chaplain,… I wouldn't have got through.'
> (40+ Level 3 nearly completed OU degree, who wants to train as an FE lecturer, male)

Given the small sample of prisoners interviewed, it is not possible to conduct the same depth of analysis into career decision-making styles as for the main stage sample (see section 5.3). For those interviewees who could focus on work and learning, and were not overwhelmed by other things such as recovering from drug addiction, the prisoners interviewed in the study seemed to approach their career decisions in much the same way as the general population. The small sample of prisoners in this study certainly shows strong elements of passive, impulsive and opportunistic decision-making in their accounts of their working lives outside prison. Many of their early career narratives are very like those of the non-prison sample who had experienced similar difficulties in accessing satisfactory work. Some seem to be using their opportunities of education in prison to adopt a more exploratory approach to career decisions.

In some instances, interviewees' reflections on their past behaviour and the future also included thinking about how they were planning for their future work and learning and how they would take decisions in the future. Some interviewees were trying to become more considered in their approach. One interviewee discussed this, but also felt he needed to keep his options open as there were a lot of unknowns in his situation. He discussed how he was also trying to take a more strategic approach to his business dealings in the future too:

> '*I could have been more planned, prepared a lot better and I could have looked after my team a lot better – there are lots of elements of business which I never used to see, I used to just do it my way or the highway type of thing and sometimes my way wasn't correct. I never planned as well as I would have liked to, looking back now...which industry I land in in 15 months time I don't know but I'm trying to prepare myself with all the main elements of business and I've also got the practical side which I can drop onto any time.*'

He continued:

> '*So I'm just all over the shop. It's like you say, because the position you're in, you just don't know where you're at when you're in here so it's hard to say, I'm going to do that because my life changes at the flick of a finger, down to myself. I know now that could change tomorrow so I just have to keep options open but work towards what I ultimately need…They all link round the management aspect of things and my past with the finance.*' (25-39, Level 3, male)

Another interviewee who had been serving a long prison sentence and had actively engaged with learning in the prison system, described how he had been putting in place knowledge, skills and qualifications so he would be ready and as prepared as possible to fulfil his work and career plans in the field of health and safety upon his release:

> '*It's like if you were going to paint your shed, you'd set everything up ready to paint your shed, and then the day you're going to paint your shed, it rains. So all you do is, you put everything down, and you leave it for a while until the weather changes. You know what you're going to do. You've got all the plans in your head, but unfortunately, at the moment, you can't do it, because circumstances won't allow it. But when it stops raining, I'll paint my shed. And that's how I see things.*' (40+, Level 3, male)

Subjects studied may be based purely on interest initially but they can then induce deeper reflection on whether these activities might lead to work activities or occupations they could pursue in future. Another interviewee was trying to change career direction on his release, from a car mechanic to a chef. He had found out about this type of work through the learning opportunities available to him in the prison setting. After exploring work in catering through his learning, he described his strategic and planned approach to trying to secure work in the sector in the future:

> '*My life plan, yes, it is set up. I've set myself goals, and in between each goal I've got little targets I have to reach if I want to achieve it at all, so if I get out when I'm 31, so if I [have] worked [it] out I've got just less than two years left.*' (25-39, Level 3, male)

Some prisoners did have a clear view of what they might do, but often planned to go back to the kind of business they were in before. We cannot easily tell whether such decisions were based on quite a strategic analysis of their options, or whether this is almost a passive decision – to go back to what one already knows. This research is not longitudinal and therefore we cannot know the extent to which prisoners' planned future goals are actually realised. The personal circumstances of some of the prisoners' we spoke to, such as drug and alcohol addiction, and their convictions, might be additional constraints on them being able to achieve their goals after release.

6.5 Conclusions

This chapter is based on the findings from a small sample of fifteen prisoners and while there are discernable trends, there are less common factors than the main stage research which was based on fifty interviews. There were differences between the two samples, discussed further in Chapter 7, but one of the prime characteristics of a sentence in prison is that it provides time for reflection and the interviews demonstrated what some prisoners can do with the opportunity and the appropriate context. Almost all the interviewees had experienced a turning point in their thinking and actions. This turning point was relevant to their career, but tended to have started with wider issues, such as family relationships and reflections on their past behaviour. We have found some examples of highly personal turning points where prisoners decided that they were going to take charge of their journey. The pressure to make that change had frequently built over years. In many cases, their early post school careers were passive, following others and often effectively rejecting their family's values. Others were adversely affected by degrees of family dysfunctionality which took years to resolve in their lives.

Career decision-making is a complex process in which the balance of contributory factors can change frequently. All the factors influencing career decision-making found in the main stage sample and outlined in Chapters 3 and 4 were also common among prisoners, although there were some differences in the balance and importance of each of these factors between the two groups (discussed more in Chapter 7). For those interviewees who could focus on work and learning, and were not overwhelmed by other things, such as recovering from drug addiction, the prisoners interviewed in the study seemed to approach their career decisions in much the same way as the general population outlined in Chapter 5. Some were and had been very passive in their behaviour; others were opportunistic, making the most of business and work opportunities that came their way; and others were trying to be strategic in their approach. As with the main stage sample, there appeared to be little use of labour market research or information to inform decisions, and the delivery implications of this are discussed in section 7.3.

The decisions about learning and work that people took reflected the balance of the factors in their control in their lives. Those for whom reconciliation with their families was the prime goal after years of separation and rejection were sometimes less concerned with the kind of work that they did, whereas others with a negative family experience had formed a passionate attachment to a business or profession. Self employment featured strongly in prisoners' plans, reflecting a desire to manage their employability in the context of a criminal record as effectively as possible or to continue in a world they were familiar with

and could control. As the study is not longitudinal it is not possible to know the extent to which prisoners' plans will be realised.

There are formal sources of IAG in prisons but the informal network of support can be just as important. Most interviewees referred to conversations with staff and fellow inmates that had formed a significant part of the journey and several also acted as a source of information and advice for fellow prisoners. Their awareness and use of information and support is further discussed in section 7.2.

7 Conclusions

This research aimed to improve the understanding of how adults make career decisions and to explore the awareness, use and satisfaction with the information and support available to adults making career decisions (including, but not limited to that provided by the National Careers Service). This chapter draws together the evidence presented throughout this report to answer the research questions and makes comparisons, where appropriate, between the findings of the main stage and prisoner samples. Lastly, we present some implications of the findings for careers support services.

7.1 How adults make career decisions

Reflecting the views of interviewees, we consider career decision-making quite broadly to include drawing together thoughts and plans on the one hand, and clear action, such as leaving a job, on the other. Examples of the questions framing career decisions among main stage respondents included: how can I work and afford childcare? Am I a good match for the advertised person specification? How can I transfer my skills and experience to work in another sector/occupation? (see section 5.1 for details of respondents' career questions). Prisoners were framing their career, work and learning questions within the constraints of their situation and in some cases with little knowledge of the labour market options that might be available to them on their release. Their questions about work and career were embedded in other issues, including re-establishing family relations (see section 6.1 for an overview of career decision-making for the prisoner sample).

The interviewees in the prison setting were operating in a very different context to the interviewees in the main stage of the research and this, along with their personal history, necessarily influenced how they thought about their careers. For all interviewees in this study, the data demonstrated a number of complex and interlinked factors affecting career decision-making, outlined in Chapters 3 and 4. These influences on career decision-making are summarised in Figure 7.1 and are valid both for the main stage and prisoner samples.

7.1.1 A model of the influences on career decision-making

The model draws on the research findings of this study as well as previous models from Hodkinson (2008) and Sampson et al. (2013), the careers resources model (Hirschi, 2012) and the Blueprint for Work/Life designs (LSIS, 2013b). The model has two halves, denoting towards the top and left, factors that are more internal to the individual (i.e. concern the way they see themselves, their situation and careers) and towards the bottom and right, factors which are more external to the individual (i.e. the wider environment). Several influencing factors sit at the join of internal/external influences. The three darker boxes represent key sets of **opportunities and constraints**. One set (on the left) relates to the individual, the second (on the right) to the world of work, and the third (at the bottom) to wider social and systemic opportunities and constraints.

The four lighter boxes illustrate the four sets of **key career issues** that individuals address in their decision-making process. The arrows between each factor and career decision-making at the centre illustrate how the factor interacts with career decision-making. The key career issues tend to be determined by the individual and have a two-way relationship with career decision-making, denoted by a double-headed arrow. The sets of opportunities and constraints tend to be more factual and relate to an individual's circumstances. These are illustrated relating to career decision-making by a zigzag, denoting a relationship, but with less direct control by the individual.

Figure 7.1: Influences on adult career decision-making
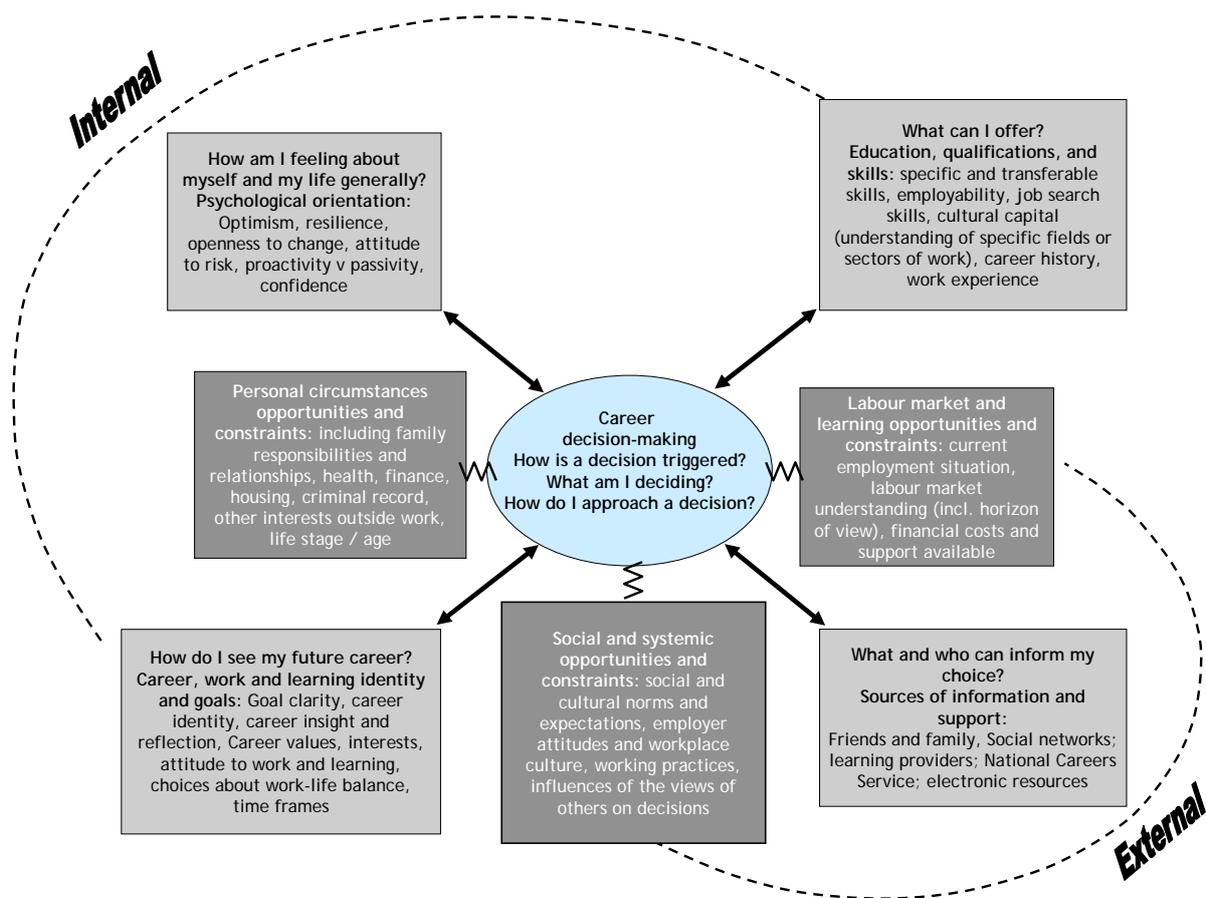
Source: IES, 2013

As shown in Chapter 5, the driver for a career decision can come from any point in the model. For example, a decision may be required from being made redundant, which would come from the labour market and learning opportunities and constraints box; by contrast, a gradual shift of values and what an individual wants from work, creating a career decision point would come from the career, work and learning identify and goals segment. Individuals move around the model in any direction and need to understand their position in relation to each of the segments to inform their career decision-making.

How interviewees made a career decision was not necessarily something they could easily explain in a linear or cause-and-effect fashion. The factors shown on the model interact in people's minds in complex ways. Interviewees therefore tended to recount a series of

events and influences on their decisions. Decisions were also underpinned by how they were feeling and their circumstances at different points in their lives.

Influences such as stress at work, and changes to family circumstances, often brought about a moment or period of career reflection or decision. For prisoners, the period in custody could be a kind of enforced reflection and the release date was also a critical point to be worked towards. Some drivers occurred slowly and over a considerable period of time, while others came out of the blue. There were several critical points in the life course where main stage interviewees were often making career decisions. These included:

- when leaving school, college or university;

- starting a family;

- after a few years in work; and

- a few years from retirement.

The life course career decisions of the prisoners we interviewed were interrupted by a period in custody and several were already marginalised from mainstream education by the age of 16 so they had already made choices that profoundly affected their future at a very young age.

In order to understand the decision-making process, it is therefore vital to identify and understand the influences on career decisions. These influences define the context in which any particular decision is made, and limit or frame the choices available, but also affect the decision-making style that individuals adopt. Within the main stage research, the aspects of the decision-making model that interviewees focused on and were influenced by most, varied considerably between individuals. The same was true of the prisoners we interviewed, although they all had in common significant personal constraints, including a criminal record and a period out of work, several also had significant drug, alcohol and related health issues.

There certainly seemed less of a desire among many of the prisoner interviewees, perhaps excluding those with their own businesses, to find work, or work with progression than among the main stage interviewees. They had less of a focus on work interest and a greater focus on contributing to society in some way. This is perhaps an acknowledgement of the circumstances and likely position in the labour market in which many ex-offenders find themselves. Prisoners, just like the wider sample, were reaching for some kind of career and life narrative about the future, as well as the past.

7.1.2 How influences on decision-making were operating in the samples

For many of the main stage interviewees, their partners framed the context within which they made decisions. Some interviewees moved for their **partner's career**, and their financial situations (a strong influence on the decision-making process) were also intertwined. For those with children, how best to balance work and childcare responsibilities was typically a joint decision. There was little evidence of prisoners

considering their future career decisions in the financial family context, although some were looking forward to being reunited with their children.

Health problems had various impacts on career decision-making for both groups of interviewees. Mental and physical illness could lead to job loss, prolonged periods of unemployment and constrained choices on return to work. One group of prisoners who had drug and/or alcohol addiction problems were heavily constrained by resulting health and addiction issues.

The issue of **confidence** emerges as key from both samples and is captured in the top left-hand quadrant of Figure 7.1. Levels of self-confidence affected respondents' belief that they could affect career change. A lack of confidence could lead to a downward spiral, whereby interviewees closed down work or learning opportunities they were offered. Other interviewees were more open to change and felt more ready to take career decisions when opportunities arose or circumstances changed. Similarly some prisoners had a positive frame of mind and others were less optimistic, as in the general sample too.

Interviewees tended to value **qualifications** and felt that these were important signals about what they could offer in the labour market. Many held a portfolio of qualifications gained throughout their lives, reflecting varied work and learning experiences, and for prisoners, to some extent this reflected the opportunities that were available to them within the prison system. Success, or otherwise in education, and the experience of learning could negatively, or positively affect individuals' self-confidence.

The recent **economic climate** has had marked effects on the employment situation of interviewees and the real and perceived work opportunities available to them, particularly those with a history of being in and out of employment. Limited understanding of the labour market was evident in the prisoner population as in the general sample. Both tended to rely on their own experience and the perceptions of people they talked to. Prisoners, like the general sample, were split between those considering something quite new, those hoping to go back to their previous occupation and those with no particular career plan.

For many interviewees, learning had helped them to progress their career. However, there were several respondents who spoke about wanting to further their studies, but being constrained by **access to finance** to fund courses. This was particularly an issue for people in their mid-career. Several prisoners had had access to learning opportunities during their period in custody, including at a higher level, and this had helped them to reflect on both themselves and possible future work.

The importance of **family and social relationships** in framing attitudes to work and learning was evident. In the prisoners, these influences were seen in terms of 'good' and 'bad' as well as in terms of which occupations and lifestyles they encouraged. The values and norms of others had a strong influence on both samples. Social and systemic constraints were important for both groups and, for prisoners, the possible impact of a criminal record on their employability was a specific additional factor.

While generally there are strong similarities between the two samples, some possible differences also emerge when prisoners are compared with the wider sample in the study.

Obviously the practical circumstances of prisoners are significantly different from those in wider society. They are not in work (although some still had contact with their business concerns) and so there is an enforced discontinuity in their careers which imposes both a clear decision of its own ('what will I do when I get out?') and a clear time frame. This is much sharper than the varied timeframes in which those in our non-prison sample were thinking about short-term and longer-term options.

There is also a clear choice here – although rarely articulated absolutely explicitly by our interviewees – between avoiding crime in future and going back to crime at some point. This was recounted, however, rather implicitly in terms of other life choices (being a valued family member for example). These deeper life choices were often voiced more than specifically work-related choices, which might be subsidiary decisions. This may also account for why the prisoners appeared to talk less about finding work which would interest them. This may simply be less important than making some kind of life outside prison (often expressed in financial and family terms) and coming to terms with their experience of crime and prison.

Being in prison did create both the need and opportunity for a period of self-reflection. In that sense, prisoners have plenty of time to think about the future – more perhaps than those busy trying to make ends meet or find a job. Although not working, prisoners were often engaged in significant education and so they were often 'learners' but not 'workers'. They did not experience as many barriers to taking up education as those outside prison, although access to courses which were only available in certain establishments were concerns for some. One would expect the prisoners to be talking about the relationship between what they are studying now and what they might do later. This was evident in some prisoner narratives but perhaps not as many as one would expect.

7.1.3 Different approaches or styles of decision-making

The factors that affect career decision-making need to be understood so an individual can use an informed decision-making process. Interviewees that had what we might call a more 'active' approach to their career decisions, tended to reflect on, maintain and develop the influences on career decision-making within their control. Some appeared more 'passive'; and were more constrained or narrower in the issues they addressed.

This study suggests that the career decision-making style an individual uses is likely to reflect the extent to which they are able to articulate and assess their career, work and learning identity and goals, understand and reflect on the skills they have and how they match to current labour market opportunities. Two main dimensions seemed to describe differences in approach to career decisions:

a) the degree of future orientation and self-awareness – in a sense the extent to which an individual reflectively looks inwards, and

b) the extent to which an individual consciously looks wider at work and learning options – in a sense how expansively an individual looks outwards.

These dimensions are shown in Figure 7.2.

There were five career decision-making styles evident among our interviewees in terms of these two main dimensions. We have called the types: strategic; exploratory; opportunistic; impulsive and passive. Within each decision-making style, there was a spectrum of the extent to which interviewees consciously looked outwards, denoted here by the dotted lines.

Figure 7.2: Career decision-making styles

Horizon: Degree to which individual consciously looks at work and learning options
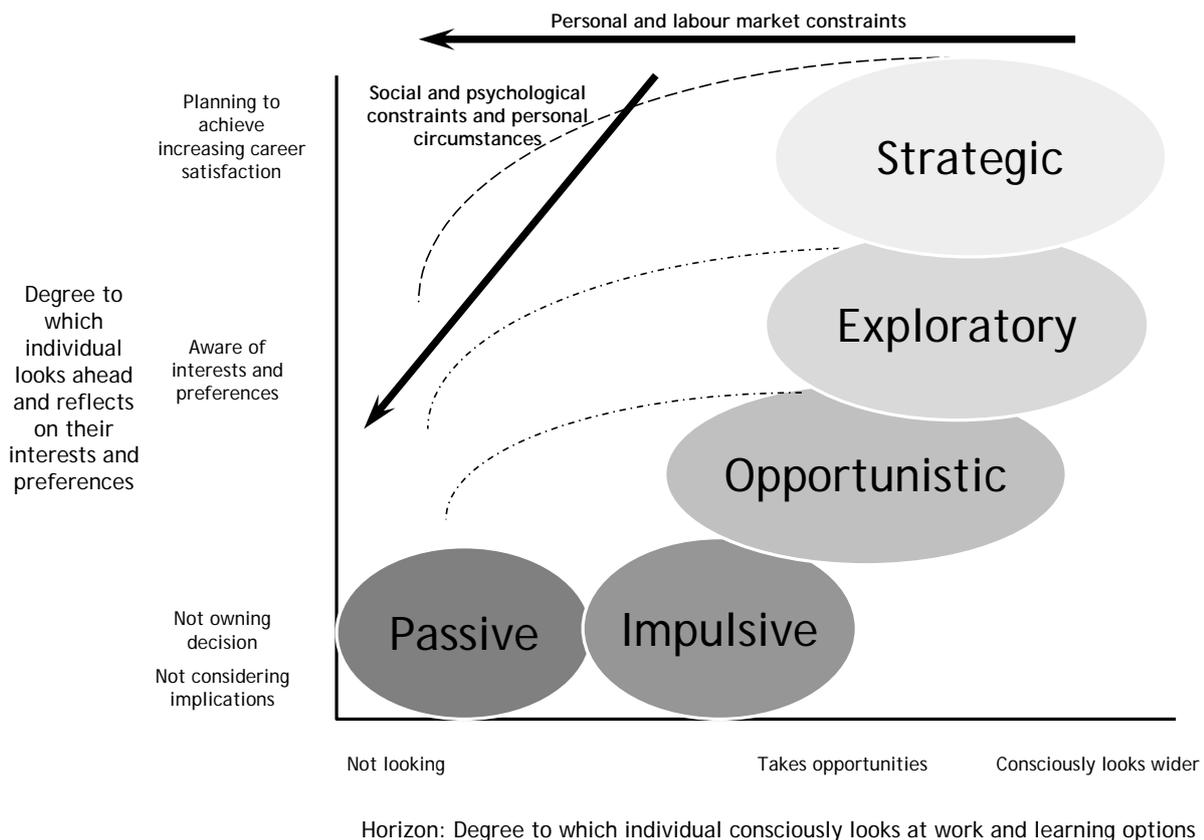
Source: IES, 2013

Some individuals had the same decision-making style consistently over time, whereas others reflected on how they made decisions in the past and had changed their approach (particularly if the outcome of a decision was unsatisfactory).

The five decision-making styles were outlined in detail in section 5.3, but can be summarised as follows:

Strategic career decision-making: this group had a style of decision-making that was considered and strategic. Individuals approaching career decisions in a strategic way tended to devote time for **self-reflection** and to aide this process by using tools such as lists, writing down the pros and cons to a particular decision, **weighing up** what was most important to them at any one time, **seeking out information** and **consulting others**, as well as consciously seeking out information to fill gaps in their understanding and what they needed to know before being able to make a decision. This group were active at finding work and learning options, deliberate in weighing up the options and were realistic about their opportunities and constraints. That is not to say that the decisions they reached

were the result of a 'rational' decision-making process. Strategic decision-makers were more than this: they were practical, and emotional, as well as cognitive.

The effectiveness of this decision-making approach will be determined by how sufficiently an individual understands their situation and their ability to apply and relate their situation to their career question and the factors influencing their career decision. While the decision-making process itself may be effective, the quality of the decision will be determined by the inputs and understanding that go into the decision process.

Exploratory career decision-making: Similar to interviewees using a strategic approach to career decision-making, those using an exploratory approach were also reflective as they considered the suitability of opportunities. The main difference in their approach was that it seemed to be a process of **active external experimentation** and trying and testing different options in practice, rather than a sometimes more analytical process of information gathering, self-reflection and prioritisation that characterised strategic decision-makers. Exploratory decision-makers described volunteering, sometimes being employed in a specific sector or occupation, and then evaluating how these work or learning opportunities fitted with their sense of self, their skills, and career goals. They did not think as much as the strategic group about the likely longer term consequences of decisions, adopting more of a 'suck it and see' approach.

Opportunistic career decision-making: this style of decision-making was characterised by primarily **responding to opportunities** when they arose, without necessarily having a planned career direction or doing much labour market research. In the exploratory and strategic styles, there was more hunting for opportunities, not just waiting for them to appear. Interviewees using this approach to career decision-making tended to feel that it was not possible to know what the future might hold, or where they might end up, and that as they made their way through their working life they would react to opportunities. Interviewees using an opportunistic approach to career decision-making responded opportunistically to situations that arose but some also actively **cultivated opportunities** through their social networks and were active at learning and development and keeping their skills and qualifications updated.

Impulsive career decision-making: this style of career decision-making was characterised by decisions that were **emotional** and **instinctive**, with little or no thought about the real options or the consequences of their decision. Typical impulsive decisions were resigning from jobs on the spur of the moment with no idea of what they might do next or simply taking a job that someone else suggests or offers.

Passive career decision-making: passive career decision-makers tended to be 'laid back' or '**drifting**' and responded to career opportunities as they presented themselves. They tended to **avoid taking decisions** completely, or let others take them, or strongly influence them. Some simply saw themselves as 'stuck'.

Individuals with more personal and labour market constraints were less likely to look broadly and have the widest possible horizon in terms of learning and work options, although some with heavy constraints still tried to find out more about possible options. Hence it was possible for heavily constrained individuals to be strategic decision-makers.

Other constraints, such as social and psychological constraints and personal circumstances, also seemed to affect the career decision-making style individuals adopted as they were less able to look ahead and to reflect on their interests and preferences, forcing them into or making it easiest to adopt decision-making styles that tended to be passive or impulsive. Prisoners with a history of drug addiction and dependency tended to be very constrained and were most likely to be passive decision-makers.

7.1.4 The importance of understanding labour market context

Even if we hear from the respondents that passive and impulsive decision-making has not served them well, we are left with the trickier question of whether strategic decision-making is necessarily 'better' than opportunistic or exploratory approaches.

We should be mindful that this study has been conducted at a time of relative labour market difficulty for individuals and rising costs of education. These conditions may affect which decision-making approaches work well. During the long years of buoyant labour markets, up to the prolonged current period of low growth, it seemed perfectly reasonable to encourage individuals to 'pursue their dream' or alternatively 'explore' by doing a wide range of jobs (often opportunistically) before deciding what they wanted to do. However, we see in the narratives in this study that hopping from one job to another (in opportunistic or even impulsive mode) tends to restrict subsequent options rather than widen them. Using an opportunistic approach to choose education courses is also less satisfactory when costs are high and one cannot always afford a second or third chance to choose an educational path.

When risks to the individual of making poor choices are high – as now - more reflective and deliberate exploratory styles, in which future decisions consciously respond to previous choices, do seem preferable to the purely opportunistic. The many individuals in this study who wanted to look further ahead and consider the implications of their choices more purposefully were asking for help with a more strategic approach. They knew they may have to gain unpaid work experience and also take relevant qualifications just to get a foot in the door. So, a more strategic approach to decision-making seemed to be their best bet in securing work which both meets their practical needs and which they experience as relatively satisfying.

7.2 Awareness, use and satisfaction with information and support

A key part of career decision-making is considering and interacting with sources of information and support. Section 4.2 details the findings specific to sources of information and support for main stage interviewees. Sometimes information and support was actively sought out by interviewees, and in other instances it was received as they went about their usual interactions. However, the extent to which interviewees were aware of and made use of all available sources of information and support varied, with some choosing not to use the support of others (further detail is provided in section 4.2).

Access to support is different for prisoners. Although their social interactions are limited by being in prison, they had much clearer access to both learning and career advice than non-prisoners. These were clearly located and freely available within the prisons though there were marked differences in awareness and status amongst prisoners (see section 6.3.2). Generally, individuals are supported by several people at once or at least over the course of their career journey, and the types or groups of people consulted can change over one's lifetime.

7.2.1 Family and friends

Families were a central influence on all our interviewees. Some perceived their expectations as too high (stretching) and others as too low (limiting) and they affected individuals in different ways. Expectations could encourage individuals to achieve more, but equally they could discourage individuals from taking action in case of failure or indeed could push them to rebel and take a contrary path. Expectations appeared to set frameworks within which individuals made decisions and took action. For the prisoners as a group, there was a sense that they needed to reconnect with their families through positive behaviour.

Family and friends were the most commonly used sources of information and support for career decisions for the main stage interviewees. They were, for most interviewees, an important and positive source of support for work and learning decisions. For prisoners, it was the support available within the prison that became their main source of information and advice, although they also drew on friends and family.

The advice and support from family and friends may be contradictory and so can cause difficulties in deciding who to listen to. Not all individuals had access to family networks for support, and some of those who did had very negative experiences of family support.

Support from family and friends can be a gentle nudge or safe space to explore options, specific advice about the range of options to consider, practical advice on how to achieve goals, or practical help with getting a job – either by supporting the interviewee with job seeking and making applications (job getting skills and materials) or by finding and securing them work (access to work). Family and friends could have a strong positive but also negative influence on individuals' decisions and actions. They could provide general encouragement, help nurture self-belief and give confidence in decision-making. Family and friends could also act as role models, inspiring individuals to follow a particular path.

7.2.2 Wider social networks

Some adults in the main stage sample and prisoners prior to their spell in custody developed and/or drew on wider social networks comprising:

- friends of friends;

- current and former work/study colleagues and employers;

- teachers and tutors;

- individuals in specific job roles; and

- fellow parents;

- members of religious or community groups.

These networks appeared to be particularly useful for information and insight rather than guidance, and were less widely used than family and friends in supporting decisions. Support from these wider networks could happen by chance and/or be initiated by another person (for example through a close friend) but could also be deliberately sought out in a more strategic way. One of the features of the more strategic decision-makers was a much more deliberate search for people who could advise them, including people they did not yet know directly.

7.2.3 Internet resources

Adults in the main stage research also used internet-based resources to inform their career decision-making. The most commonly mentioned use of the internet was for finding and applying for jobs, although users were not always able to get the level of detail about job vacancies they required to decide whether or not to apply. Other uses of internet resources included researching potential occupations or employers, and researching learning options. Those who used recruitment sites to try and find out about jobs more generally found this a rather unsuccessful strategy and relatively few found their way to websites with wider labour market or occupational information.

In a few cases, interviewees accessed more practical support online such as chatting online to an advisor, using tools to build a CV or assess their skills, or to access free learning, but most typically the internet was used as an information resource, rather than for providing more structured and tailored advice or guidance.

Most users were positive about the internet in supporting career decisions as it was something in their control that could be accessed at the right time and pace for them and allowed them to be proactive: it was quick, impersonal, and provided them with a range of information. However there were some concerns raised around the reliability and currency of the data, and that using the internet effectively required both technical and research skills. Finding the most useful websites for a particular purpose is a major problem for those who are not guided in their use of internet resources.

7.2.4 Careers services and other support

Many interviewees were either unaware that career guidance (either face to face or telephone based) is now delivered by the NCS or were unaware of more specifically what support they could access from this service. At least in this sample, the NCS brand had not yet penetrated public consciousness.

Some interviewees had used formal careers services – accessed via social workers, learning providers or Jobcentre Plus or the NCS. Formal career support was used for a variety of means by main stage respondents. The services they tended to be offered were the provision of practical help in getting a job (CV writing, interview skills) or advice in

accessing learning, rather than a more in-depth discussion about career interests and preferences. Many felt they did not get sufficient support aimed at helping them make sense of their opportunities and constraints, and to develop their understanding of their interests and preferences. A small number of other main stage interviewees explicitly expressed that they wanted more formal career advice at some stage in their careers.

Support via Jobcentre Plus was seen as having a strong focus on getting individuals into a job and did not take as much account of their needs and ambitions. Those individuals looking for more in-depth guidance wanted help in finding work that fitted around the other influences, opportunities and constraints on their career decision-making process.

Prisoners, by contrast, were often in closer proximity to support services and had frequent contact with a range of staff within the prison establishment. They tended to value face-to-face support. Several identified that they would have liked more support with how to set up a business or become self-employed upon their release.

There was a group of interviewees who had received in-depth support but not from those in specific career guidance roles. The sources of this support were either professionals in other personal services (such as social workers or teachers in further or higher education), managers at work or people in sub-professional roles who got to know the individuals quite well (such as support or administrative workers in housing or social care). These people often provided a listening ear to the aspirations and concerns of the individual and helped them think through their decisions.

Some adults relied upon their own internal resources to research options and make decisions, having little or no input from family, friends, internet or formal sources of information, advice or guidance. These were often individuals who felt they were not the type of person who takes advice or asks for help.

7.3 Delivery implications for career guidance and support

This research has important implications for the provision of career guidance and support, whether through public services or other providers. These delivery implications concern improving the awareness and understanding of available career support among adults; enhancing adviser support for career decision-making; enhancing and deploying web-based tools to support career decision-making; and building capability to deliver better career guidance and support for individuals making career decisions. These are discussed in turn, with reference made to the relevant sections in this report that provide the supporting evidence.

A. Improving awareness and understanding of career support

The majority of interviewees actively sought advice from others (section 4.2), with only a small number choosing to make career decisions with no social support (section 4.2.6). The literature suggests that sources of information and advice offer individual short-cuts in decision-making (section 2.1). The majority of interviewees actively sought advice from others and used sources of information and support. The overview of career decision-

making styles in Figure 5.1 illustrated that individuals need to look broadly at their work and learning options and to reflect on their interests and preferences if they are to use strategic, exploratory, and opportunistic decision-making styles most effectively. Clearly, career advice has a role in supporting people to develop this understanding and some interviewees reflected that they wanted advice from independent experts to support their career decision-making (section 4.2.4 *Need for formal support*) – this issue is considered further in delivery implication A2. However, there was a low level of awareness and understanding of formal sources of career guidance, information and support in our main stage sample (section 4.2.4 *National Careers Service*). Even those individuals whom we knew to have received career advice or guidance from public services did not always recognise this and did not always know which organisation had been giving the support and what their range of provision might be. Therefore, publicly funded careers services need much clearer and more visible marketing if they are to be used by all adults who would like career advice when making work and learning decisions. How to do this is considered in delivery implication A1. The following suggestions are two ways in which careers services might improve awareness and understanding of career support.

A1: Improve awareness and understanding of career support

Co-located careers services need to retain their distinctiveness and be seen to be clearly independent by customers from the services they co-locate with. Once customers have a good awareness and understanding of the careers service, including what they provide and who can access it, service users would then be better able to advocate careers services via word of mouth.

To invest in the development of awareness and understanding of careers services, the careers support offer and associated branding needs to remain consistent over a number of years. Adults will therefore know where to return to for support throughout their career.

A2: Link to public career websites from other (commercial) websites

Most respondents using the internet in relation to career decision-making did so primarily for job search (section 4.2.3). To improve awareness and understanding of the wider services available to support career decision-making, careers services could advertise and link from other career-related sites that individuals are already using, such as recruitment websites. This would drive traffic to publically-funded career websites. Such sites could include commercial sites (some examples used by respondents are outlined in section 4.2.3) and those websites supporting other related public services, such as universal job match (the new Jobcentre Plus online vacancy service).

B. Enhancing adviser supported career decision-making

Interviewees who had used career support felt there was too much emphasis on job-getting skills (such as CV writing), especially if they were quite good at getting jobs but in jobs they did not find satisfying. Careers services were often seen by participants as more interested in getting someone into work or learning than helping them choose a course or a job they would enjoy or do well at (section 4.2.4). Many interviewees had become more

reflective over their lives about the kinds of things they found interesting (section 3.1.1) and they wanted career support which would help them further develop or use these insights as their start point for decision-making (section 4.2.4). The overview of career decision-making styles in Figure 7.2 also illustrated that individuals need to reflect on their interests and preferences if they are to use strategic, exploratory, and opportunistic decision-making styles most effectively. This is considered further in delivery implication B1.

Individuals in our sample had accessed career support face-to-face, by telephone and online. Individuals needing face-to-face and telephone-based career support will cover the spectrum of decision-making styles. There were examples of individuals who tended to be strategic decision-makers now struggling to find a new direction or the answers to their career questions, and who would have welcomed face-to-face or telephone-based career advice or guidance. Individuals with passive or impulsive decision-making styles are arguably more likely to need in-depth career support, indeed they are perhaps least likely to be seeking career information at all. Providing online information and tools to aid career decision-making will meet the needs of some adults, some of the time, but there will remain a complementary role for careers services delivered face-to-face and by telephone to support career decision-making and to meet individual's preferences about how to engage with careers services (section 4.2.3 *Benefits and challenges of using the internet to support career decisions*). Meeting individual need is considered further in delivery implications B1 and B2.

Increasing the ability of individuals to self-serve and make effective career decisions in the future will help to manage the costs of delivering career support and delivering more sustainable outcomes. The outcomes of career support should try to encourage individuals to develop independence, self-management and help individuals plan for the unplanned, develop resilience and the ability to prioritise, and to initiate and monitor career activities – skills that enhance influences on career decision-making, such as psychological orientation and education and skills as illustrated in Figure 7.1. Career support should encourage behaviours, such as researching and looking widely at work and learning options, looking ahead, and reflecting on interests and preferences that were shown in Figure 7.2 to be key skills in encouraging strategic, exploratory and opportunistic decision-making styles. The theory of planned happenstance (section 2.1) highlighted how individuals can use chance events as a positive platform for career development. These are skills which can be taught as part of the process of career guidance – this is considered further in delivery implication B2.

Many of the interviewees had an extremely narrow understanding of the occupations and job roles they might be able to do (section 4.1.1). Much of their labour market understanding came from job advertisements and new ideas came from the work experiences of their friendship networks or even people they simply bumped into (sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2). Very few people deliberately sought out those who could tell them about specific labour markets and this was not a topic that respondents tended to ask themselves career questions about (section 5.1). This highlighted the lack of such research skills in the majority of the sample. The more strategic decision-makers looked much wider at what they might be able to do and how to get there (section 5.3) – this is considered further in delivery implication B3.

The issue of narrow labour market understanding was much the same for prisoners as for the wider sample. Where they were interested in a new occupation, they did not seem to have researched it very much (section 6.3.1), displaying the characteristics of satisficing (settling for an adequate selection rather than optimal one) highlighted in the wider literature (section 2.1). Outside prison, going to see people is a natural way of doing labour market research. Inside prison, other methods will be needed – this is considered further in delivery implication B4.

B1: Provide support based on individual need

Career support should start with the needs of the individual. Consider the balance between supporting individuals with job-getting skills and a 'work-first' approach (such as CV writing), and providing career support that will help them to further develop insight into, for example, what they are good at or could become good at.

Career guidance is a depth of service required by some individuals. Other individuals require much shorter interventions, with more discrete outputs, and some can self-serve using web-based tools. The funding of career support should sufficiently reflect the diversity of needs and give flexibility to providers to best meet the varied needs of their clients to support their career decision-making.

Career resources need to reflect the range of decision-making styles and acknowledge that some individuals will be making decisions in an opportunistic or exploratory way for example, rather than being overtly strategic (ordered, list-making etc).

To illustrate how to make an informed career decision, and to make good use of labour market information in this process, career support organisations could develop case-studies of individuals' career decision-making processes available as a career resource.

B2: Develop individuals' career decision-making skills

Careers services should continue to offer access to services through a range of channels (web, telephone and face-to-face), reflecting the different levels of self-reliance of career decision-makers. These channels need to be linked and to build the career management and decision-making skills of individuals in order to increase the likelihood they will be able to self-serve in future.

The model of career decision-making styles developed in this research (Figure 7.2) could be used to train advisers to deal with different decision-making styles. As part of advice sessions, individuals could be asked to discuss how they have approached career decision-making in the past and how they plan to approach their current career decision. Advisers may then be able to encourage behaviours, such as looking widely at work and learning options, looking ahead and reflecting on interests and preferences, to encourage career management skills and to deliver advice and support in a way consistent with the preferred decision-making style of a customer.

Careers services could help develop individuals' understanding about how to make career decisions, for example within a study format (e.g. in career workshops), and

---

develop the skills to manage their careers. In prisons, career decision-making could be linked to other reflection that prisoners undertake about their past and their future (see the Annex for more detail about links between the career decision-making model and the resettlement pathways). Existing computer-based career education tools used to support young people could be adapted for an adult audience.

B3: Widen opportunity awareness

Career support should help individuals to understand a wider range of feasible work and learning options. Careers advisers should encourage individuals to make better use of formal sources of information but also to utilise wider social networks, and make contact with people working in a job they think they might be suited to. Developing the career research skills of clients should be an explicit part of the purpose and content of career support

Careers services could signpost to other organisations to support the wider context of career decision-making, for example, signposting to business support organisations for individuals wanting to start a business or to become self-employed.

B4: Enhance support for prisoner's career decision-making

Prisons could consider how best to join-up the various individuals and organisations giving career support, including Listeners, mentors and advice services, as well as the National Careers Service, in order to improve coherence.

Consideration should be given to how prisoners making career decisions could have access to information about jobs without needing internet access, for example via video clips of people's work experiences. Providers could be encouraged to develop offline versions of their online content. Other options could be used near the end of sentences (eg visits or discussions with those doing work of interest). Wider use could be made of existing resources, such as Virtual Campus.

Prisons could develop strategies to support prisoners' understanding of how to tackle the potential barrier of having a criminal record when seeking work so they can best understand any constraints as part of the decision-making process.

C. Enhancing and deploying web-based tools to support decision-making

There is probably much more useful support online than most of those in our sample were using. Even some of those who described themselves as being digitally literate struggled to find the information they needed and the answers to their questions using the internet as they primarily used it for job search (section 4.2.3). Our analysis of decision-making styles illustrated in Figure 7.2 showed that passive and impulsive career decision-makers are less likely to seek out information overall and tend to have the lowest awareness of their interests and preferences. Likewise, behavioural science research evidences how individuals use mental short-cuts to reduce the burden of career decision-making (section 2.1). This highlights a need for career support services to 'push' information to individuals who may not be seeking it or who may struggle to access it. How careers services might consider this is highlighted in delivery implications C1 and C3.

Sources of formal advice seemed to be more visible in prison than outside it (section 7.2). Here, the issue may not be so much about lack of awareness but whether prisoners fully understand the career advice which is available to them and whether they use it at appropriate times. For example, those prisoners dealing with substance abuse may need to make considerable progress with their health before they feel ready to talk about work and learning issues (section 6.2.2 *Physical and mental health and disability*). Increasing the readiness to receive career support among prisoners and the rest of the population is considered in delivery implication C2.

Looking at job vacancies did not really help individuals to obtain a higher level appreciation of labour market trends (section 4.2.3). Career labour market information needs to be both high level, outlining overall industry trends, and detailed, about day to day experience, covering what it is like to work in a particular occupation. Individuals with labour market constraints need to know specific details about job vacancies, including location, expectations of travel, working hours (or whether flexible working patterns will be considered) etc, to know if the job will be suitable. Others want to know what working in a sector or occupation would be like more generally – this is considered further in delivery implication C1 and 3.

C1: Help people find what they need online

Delivery implication A2 suggested that careers services should be linked from websites and resources that career decision-makers were already using. This would not only increase awareness and understanding of career support services, but also the likelihood that people could find what they need to support their decision-making online. Some individuals may need online tools to be demonstrated to them in order to understand how they work and how they could support their decision-making.

Career support organisations and organisations with an interest in labour market information could develop guidance for employers about the minimum level of information required in job advertisements in order to aide individuals' career decision-making. This could include whether flexible working patterns would be accepted, the usual place of work, and whether travel is required. This would also potentially benefit employers by receiving applications from individuals able to meet job requirements.

Consideration could be given to the application of technologies that could 'push' appropriate and relevant career information to individuals according to their needs and preferences, to help them make their own sense of the opportunities and challenges open to them, through alerts on new or changed web-based information and resources, for example on Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). Current technologies could be adapted for the purpose.

C2: Use the findings from this study to help people develop their decision-making skills

Assuming adults know more about where services might be available, the model of influences on career decision-making presented in this study (Figure 7.1) could be adapted to an online 'toolkit' resource, to encourage individuals to question themselves

---

and others in order to develop self-awareness prior to speaking to a careers adviser or others, including friends and family. Developing self-awareness about these issues pre-careers support would increase an individual's readiness to receive advice and develop their career decision-making skills.

C3: Make best use of existing Labour Market Information

Consider how careers services can make best use of local labour market data and intelligence available to Local Enterprise Partnerships and others. Consider whether 'open access' career information, in a format similar to Wikipedia with multiple users providing authorship and updates, could be of benefit in providing real-time information and capturing the real life experience of working in specific sectors.

D. Building capability to deliver better career support

Some individuals in this study had received their most valuable career support from (sometimes fairly junior) staff in other services they were using, for example health, social services or housing. They were likely to have more contact with such staff than with fully qualified professionals and also knew them for longer (section 4.2.5) – this issue is considered further in delivery implication D1.

D1: Develop and enhance the right skills in wider services to support career decision-making

Professional associations for career practitioners, such as The Career Development Institute (CDI) could work with partners to develop awareness among professionals in a range of public services that give career support to individuals about how to best help individuals in their work and learning decisions and how to effectively signpost to career support.

Professional associations for career practitioners and their partners could develop and publicise training materials and courses for those in other personal service occupations, to acquire a higher level of skill in supporting individuals with their career decision-making challenges.

Bibliography

Arnold J (2004), 'The congruence problem in John Holland's theory of vocational decisions'. *Journal of Occupational & Organizational Psychology*, Wiley-Blackwell, vol. 77(1), pp. 95-113

Bandura A (1977), *Social learning theory*. Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall

Bimrose J, Barnes S A (2010), *Labour Market Information (LMI), Information Communications and Technologies (ICT) and Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG): The way forward*? UK Commission for Employment and Skills, London

Bimrose J, Barnes S A, Attwell G (2010), *An Investigation into the Skills Needed by Connexions Personal Advisers to Develop Internet-Based Guidance*, CfBT Education Trust, Reading

Bimrose J, Barnes S A, Hughes D, Orton M (2007), *Navigating the labour market: career decision-making and the role of guidance,* Department for Education and Skills, Research Report

BIS (2013) analysis of Annual Population Survey, Nomis.

BIS (2012), *National Careers Service: The right advice at the right time*, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, London

BIS (2012b) National Adult Learner Survey 2010, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, London Research Paper 63 – accessed 14/08/13: http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/BISCore/further-education-skills/docs/N/12-p164-national-adult-learner-survey-2010.pdf

BIS and MoJ (2011), *Making prisons work: Skills for rehabilitation*, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, London

Blustein D L, Strohmer D C (1987), 'Vocational hypothesis testing in career decision-making', *Journal of Vocational Behavior,* vol. 31(1), pp. 45-62

Bysshe S (2011), *Issues and challenges for career guidance advisers using and sharing career-related labour market information (LMI),* UK Commission for Employment and Skills, London

Citizens Advice Bureau (2007), *Locked out*, Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) evidence on prisoners and ex-offenders, March 2007

CFE (2012), *Using and sharing career related labour market information,* UK Commission for Employment and Skills, London

Colozzi E A (2003), 'Depth-Oriented Values Extraction', *Career Development Quarterly*, vol. 52, pp. 180-189, Wiley-Blackwell

Corston J (2007), *The Corston Report: The need for a distinct, radically different, visibly-led, strategic, proportionate, holistic, woman-centred, integrated approach*, Prison Reform Trust

Darnton A (2008), *Reference Report: An overview of behaviour change models and their uses*, GSR Behaviour Change Knowledge Review

Dolan P, Hallsworth M, Halpern D, King D, Vlaev I (2010), *MINDSPACE: Influencing behaviour through public policy*, Institute for Government

Eigen C A, Hartman B W, Hartman PT (1987), 'Relations between family interaction patterns and career indecision', *Psychological Reports,* vol. 60(1), pp. 87-94

Epstein S (1994), 'Integration of the cognitive and the psychodynamic unconscious', *American Psychologist,* vol. 49(8), pp. 709-724

Foskett R, Johnston B (2010), 'A uniform seemed the obvious thing: experiences of careers guidance amongst potential HE participants', *Journal of Further and Higher Education,* vol. 34(2), pp. 223-238

Gazzaniga M (1985), *The social brain*, Basic Books, New York

Gelatt H (1989), 'Positive uncertainty: A new decision-making framework for counselling', *Journal of Counselling Psychology,* vol. 36(2), pp. 252-256

GHK (2010), *The use of LMI in Online Career Direction and Learning,* UK Commission for Employment and Skills, London

Greenbank P (2011), ''I'd rather talk to someone I know than somebody who knows' - the role of networks in undergraduate career decision-making', *Research in Post-Compulsory Education,* vol. 16(1), pp. 31-45

Greenbank P, Hepworth S (2008), *Working class students and the career decision-making process: a qualitative study,* Higher Education Careers Services Unit, Manchester

Hall D T, Chandler D E (2005), 'Psychological success: When the career is a calling', *Journal of Organizational Behavior,* vol. 26(2), pp. 155-176

Hamilton F (2011), *National Careers Service Customer Personas*, Presentation. Information Management Services, NCS, London

Hawthorn R, Jackson C (2004), *Employment and Training Advice for Refugees: What Works?* NICEC/ CRAC, Cambridge

Hayes J (2012), John Hayes in response to Parliamentary Question 105342 from Gordon Marsden MP, 24 April

Hayes J (2011), Statement by John Hayes on National Careers Service for England, 13 April

Hedges A, Sykes W (2009), *Extending working life: changing the culture, Qualitative research into effective messages*, DWP RREP 557, Department for Work and Pensions, London

Hirschi A (2012), 'The career resources model: an integrative framework for career counsellors', *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling,* vol. 40(4), pp. 369-383

Hodkinson P (2008), *Understanding career decision-making and progression: Careership revisited*. John Killeen Memorial Lecture, 16 October, CRAC/ NICEC, London

Hodkinson P, Sparkes A, Hodkinson H (1996), *Triumphs and Tears: Young people, markets and the transition from school to work*, David Fulton, London

Holland J (1996), 'Exploring careers with a typology: What we have learned and some new directions'. *American Psychologist,* vol. 51(4), pp. 397-406

Hooley T, Devins D, Watts A J, Hutchinson J, Marriott J, Walton F (2012a), *Tackling unemployment, supporting business and developing careers,* UK Commission for Employment and Skills, London

Hooley T, Watts A J, Sultana R G, Nearya S (2012b), 'The 'Blueprint' framework for career management skills: a critical exploration'. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling,* vol. 41(2), pp. 117-131

Hooley T, Hutchinson J, Watts A J (2010), *Careering Through the Web: The potential of Web 2.0 and 3.0 technologies for career development and career support services*. UK Commission for Employment and Skills, London

Hopkins, K. (2012), *The pre-custody employment, training and education status of newly sentences prisoners: results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) longitudinal cohort study of prisoners*, Ministry of Justice – accessed 13/08/13: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/217400/pre-custody-empl-training-edu-status-newly-sentenced-prisoners.pdf

Hutchinson J, Devins D, Hooley T, Kelsey S (2012), *Developing business. Developing careers. How and why employers are supporting the career development of their employees,* UK Commission for Employment and Skills, London

INON (2011), *Career guidance: Understanding the behaviour of individuals*. UK Commission for Employment and Skills, London

Ipsos MORI (2009 unpublished), *Segmentation Study*. Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, London

Johns Hopkins University (2013), 'The Career Decision-making Model'. – accessed 13/02/13:
http://www.jhu.edu/careers/students/ExploreyourOptions/careerdecisionmakingmodel.html

Kahneman D (2003), 'A perspective on judgement and choice. Mapping bounded rationality', *American Psychologist* vol. 58(9), pp. 697-720

Ketterson T U, Blustein D L (1997), 'Attachment relationships and the career exploration process', *Career Development Quarterly* vol. 46(2), pp. 167-178

Kidd J (1981), 'The assessment of career development', in Watts A, Super D, Kidd J, *Career Development in Britain*, CRAC, Cambridge

Kidd J (2006), *Understanding Career Counselling: Theory, Research and Practice,* Sage, London

Kossek E E, Roberts K, Fisher S, Demarr B (1998), 'Career self-management: A quasi-experimental assessment of the effects of a training intervention', *Personnel Psychology* vol. 51(4), pp. 935-962

Krieshok T S, Black M D, McKay R A (2009), 'Career decision-making: The limits of rationality and the abundance of non-conscious processes', *Journal of Vocational Behavior,* vol. 75(3), pp. 275-290

Law B (1981), 'Careers theory: a third dimension?' in Watts A, Super D, Kidd J, *Career development in Britain*, CRAC, Cambridge

Learning and Skills Improvement Service (2013a) – accessed 11/06/13:
http://www.lsis.org.uk/news/blueprint-careers-pointing-way-success

Learning and Skills Improvement Service (2013b) – accessed 11/06/13:
http://repository.excellencegateway.org.uk/fedora/objects/eg:2130/datastreams/DOC/content

Lease S H, Dahlbeck D T (2009), 'Parental Influences, Career Decision-Making Attributions, and Self-Efficacy: Differences for Men and Women?', *Journal of Career Development,* vol. 36(2), pp. 95-113

Lent R W, Brown S D (1996), 'Social cognitive approach to career development: An overview', *Career Development Quarterly,* vol. 44(4), pp. 310

Lent R W, Brown S D, Hackett G (1994), 'Toward a Unifying Social Cognitive Theory of Career and Academic Interest, Choice, and Performance', *Journal of Vocational Behavior,* vol. 45(1), pp. 79-122

Mitchell K E, Levin A S, Krumboltz J D (1999), 'Planned Happenstance: Constructing Unexpected Career Opportunities', *Journal of Counselling & Development*, vol. 77, pp. 115-124, Wiley-Blackwell

National Life/Work Centre (2006), Blueprint for Life/ Work Designs - The Quick Reference Guide. Memramcook, National Life/Work Centre – accessed 13/02/13: http://206.191.51.163/blueprint/documents/BP_QUICK_REFERENCE_GUIDE.doc

Nicholson N, de Waal-Andrews W (2005), 'Playing to win: Biological imperatives, self-regulation, and trade-offs in the game of career success', *Journal of Organizational Behavior,* vol. 26(2), pp. 137-154

ONS (2013) – accessed 09/05/13: http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census/key-statistics-for-local-authorities-in-england-and-wales/sty-non-uk-born-population.html

Packard B, Babineau (2009), 'From Drafter to Engineer, Doctor to Nurse: An Examination of Career Compromise as Renegotiated by Working-Class Adults over Time', *Journal of Career Development,* vol. 35(3), pp. 207-227

Packard B, Nguyen D (2003), 'Science career-related possible selves of adolescent girls: A longitudinal study', *Journal of Career Development,* vol. 29, pp. 251-262

Page R, Newton B, Hawthorn R, Hunt W, Hillage J (2007), *An Evaluation of the Ufl/learndirect Telephone Guidance Trial*, Research Report RR833, Department for Education and Skills

Parsons F (1909), *Choosing a vocation*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston

Purcell K, Elias R, Ellison R, Atfield G, Adam D, Livanos I (2008), *Applying for higher education – the diversity of career choices, plans and expectations. Findings from the first Futuretrack survey of the 'Class of 2006' applicants for HE,* HECSU/ WIER, Manchester

Sampson J P, McClain M C, Musch E, Reardon R C (2013), 'Variables affecting readiness to benefit from career interventions', *The Career Development Quarterly,* vol. 61(2), pp. 98-109

Schein E (2007), 'Career anchors revisited: Implications for career development in the 21st century', *NHRD Journal,* vol. 1(4), pp. 27-33

Simon H A (1955), 'A behavioral model of rational choice', *Quarterly Journal of Economics,* vol. 69(1) pp. 99-118

Social Exclusion Unit (2002), *Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners*, July 2002

Sullivan S E, Carden W A, Martin D F (1998), 'Careers in the next millennium: Directions for future research', *Human Resource Management Review,* vol. 8(2), pp. 165

Sultana R (2010), 'Career guidance re-viewed: tiger, tiger, burning bright?', *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, vol. 38(1), pp. 113-130

Super D (1980), 'A life-span, life-space approach to career development', *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, vol. 16(3), pp. 282-298

Tinsley H E A (2000), 'The Congruence Myth: An Analysis of the Efficacy of the Personal-Environment Fit Model', *Journal of Vocational Behavior,* vol. 56(2), pp. 147-179

Thaler, R. and Sunstein, C. (2009), *Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth and happiness*, Penguin Books

UKCES (2011), *Helping individuals succeed: Transforming careers guidance*, UK Commission for Employment and Skills, London

Wethington E, Kessler R, Pixley J E (2004), 'Turning points in adulthood', pp. 586-613 in Brim O G, Ryff C, Kessler R, *How healthy are we?: A national study of well-being at midlife*, University of Chicago Press

Weyman A, Wainwright D, O'Hara R, Jones P, Buckingham A (2012), *Extending working life - Behaviour change interventions*, DWP RREP 809, Department for Work and Pensions, London

Annex: research tools and additional information

Resettlement pathways and the career decision-making model

The analytical model maps clearly across to the resettlement pathways that are in use across the prison estate. This should not be a surprise, given that both describe a range of factors that need to be addressed before successful work outcomes can be achieved. The study has demonstrated that prison staff and their agency colleagues work closely with prisoners to help them understand how they see their future careers and provide access to Information, Advice and Guidance as part of their work within the seven or nine pathways.

The seven resettlement pathways, as devised by NOMS (the National Offender Management Service) are:

- Pathway 1: accommodation and support

- Pathway 2: education, training and employment

- Pathway 3: health

- Pathway 4: drugs and alcohol

- Pathway 5: finance, benefits and debt

- Pathway 6: children and families, and

- Pathway 7: attitudes, thinking and behaviour.

An additional two pathways were suggested by the Corston Report (2007) on women in prisons:

- Pathway 8: support for women who have been abused, raped or who have experienced domestic violence
- Pathway 9: support for women who have been involved in prostitution.

In Figure A.1, these pathways have been mapped onto the adult career decision-making model.

Figure A.1: Resettlement pathways mapped to influences on adult career decision-making model

Internal

7. Attitudes, thinking and behaviour

How am I feeling about myself and my life generally? Psychological orientation: Optimism, resilience, openness to change, attitude to risk, proactivity v passivity, confidence

What can I offer? Education, qualifications, and skills: specific and transferable skills, employability, job search skills, cultural capital (understanding of specific fields or sectors of work), career history, work experience

2. Training and education

1. Accommodation

6. Children and families

3. & 4. Health, drugs and alcohol

5. Finance, benefits and debt

Personal circumstances opportunities and constraints: including family responsibilities and relationships, health, finance, housing, criminal record, other interests outside work, life stage / age

Career decision-making How is a decision triggered? What am I deciding? How do I approach a decision?

Labour market and learning opportunities and constraints: current employment situation, labour market understanding (incl. horizon of view), financial costs and support available

2. Employment

How do I see my future career? Career, work and learning identity and goals: Goal clarity, career identity, career insight and reflection, career values, interests, attitude to work and learning, choices about work-life balance, time frames

Social and systemic opportunities and constraints: social and cultural norms and expectations, employer attitudes and workplace culture, working practices, influences of the views of others on decisions

What and who can inform my choice? Sources of information and support: Friends and family, social networks; learning providers; National Careers Service; electronic resources

8. Women affected by abuse and violence

9. Women involved in prostitution

External

Source: IES, 2013

191

Main stage topic guide

This version of the topic guide has been revised following the main stage pilot.

Introduction to the research

- Introduce self and IES (independent research organisation).

- Remind respondent of how they were selected (National Careers Service sample/ opt-in).

- Introduce the research. The aim is to interview people making choices about their work and learning or making changes to their work. This can involve choices relating to learning, trying to find work, your job or more generally about your career.

> The interview will cover
>
> ■ your past experiences of work and learning
>
> ■ how you have made/are making choices about or changes to work and learning
>
> ■ sources of information and support that you have used and found helpful when making choices about work and learning and how important they are

- The research is for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (the government department that looks after careers advice for adults) and will contribute to understanding how people make work and learning choices and the services and support they need to help them.

- Explain about confidentiality: Note that no personal data will be shared with BIS or other organisations without the expressed permission of the respondent. Note that all views will be reported anonymously.

- Likely length of discussion (approx. one hour/possible one-and-a-half hours), check that they are OK to stay at least for one hour.

- Explain about the £30 incentive (vouchers).

- Ask if they have any questions/clarifications about the research

- Ask to sign the consent form (provide oral consent for telephone interviewees).

- Explain about recording and seek permission to record.

- Remind them that participation is voluntary and they can opt-out at any time.

1. Career history: timeline approach

We would like to use this timeline to discuss key events in your career/life history – including your work, learning and any family or other circumstances that have affected the work and learning you have done.

> Note for telephone interviews: the timeline should have been posted to the respondent alongside the interview confirmation letter and/or emailed to them. Ask the respondent to complete the document alongside you completing a copy.

Could we start with when you left school or college, and work up to where you are now.

We can mark work and learning activities and periods above the line; and key family, social and other life events below the line.

Respondent/interviewer to mark key points on the timeline
Could you talk me through the events as you/we mark them down?
Probe for the following types of events/changes/choices made:

- qualifications gained and periods of learning (where the learning was undertaken and whether full/part-time)

- work history (type of work undertaken; full/part-time etc)

- any periods out of work

- any prolonged periods of ill-health

- voluntary or community work

- caring commitments (children and/or other relatives)

- moving area

> As respondent talks through their history, probe for the following

A: Probe for factors of influence:

What were/are you considering when making that change?

> *Probe: previous work experience and work record, the kinds of jobs available, future opportunities/employment, geographical location, the type of work or training which interests me, the skills I'm good at, my qualifications, funding and finance, work/life balance and family life, what my friends think*

What is the relative importance of each of these?

B: Probe for sources of information, advice and support

At the times people are thinking about their work/learning choices we would like to collect details about the information, advice and support they used. Please use the following set of questions about sources of information and support at any relevant point within the timeline discussion.

Did you get any advice/information/support at that time?

Did you talk to…..?

Did you look at….?

Probe: friends and family, National Careers Service (web, telephone, face-to-face), job adverts, colleagues, books, social networks, teachers, careers professionals, employer/work colleagues, learning provider (eg college), advice provided/paid for by an employer in a redundancy situation, general information (TV, papers, internet), online social media and forums/ other web resources

What questions did you have? (What were you hoping to find out? What did you need to know? What did you need help with?)

How useful did you find it? How did it help you?

What other sources of information and support were you aware of, but didn't use? Why?

Probe: National Careers Service (web, telephone and face-to-face); nextstep and Careers Advice Service (2010-12), nextstep (pre 2010), learndirect (pre 2010),

What gaps did you find in the support on offer?

What else would you have found helpful? Why?

The future

After you have discussed their current situation and circumstances (reached NOW on the timeline), we want to the respondent to think about the future

What are your goals for the future?

Probe for:

- short-term goals (timeframe?)

- longer-term goals (timeframe?)

What do you see happening next?

What might help you achieve what you want? What might hold you back?

2. Reflections

What are the most important things you (would) look for from work?

Explain that people find different things important, for example: steady employment and security, variety, autonomy, challenge, financial rewards, social status, helping others, influence, social aspects of work.

Is there one thing you need more than anything else from work?

In the process of thinking about work/learning (and making changes to these aspects of your life) what have you learned:

Probe: about yourself; your priorities; the labour market; your career direction.

Has what is important to you changed over time?

What sources of information, advice or support have been most useful to you in making choices about your work and learning?

Have your views on where you might look for information or support changed over time and why? (if answers are too general, probe for 'information, advice or support to help make changes to work or learning patterns or to think about these things and the choices you have?')

What level of detail do you find useful in the information you use to make choices?
Probe for work information: *level of earnings, qualifications required, progression opportunities, availability of local vacancies*
Probe for learning information: *course content, assessment methods, cost, timing, progression opportunities to further learning, which job roles require the qualification*

What have you learned about how to make (future) work/learning choices/changes?

How would you describe how you go about making work/learning choices/changes?

How has the way you make work/learning choices changed over your life?

Looking back, is there anything you would have done differently? Why is that? (if answers are too general, probe for 'in your work/learning')

What work/learning choices or changes do you think you might make in the future?

Do you think you will approach these differently from past ones?

What sources of information and support do you think you will need to help you?

What advice would you pass on to someone about to make a decision about their work, learning or career?

Is there anything else you'd like to add about making work and learning choices?

3. Background details

Check for the purposes of analysis that you have the following pieces of information about the respondent. *NB: no need to ask questions if already covered elsewhere*

- Highest level of qualification

- Age

- Gender

- Current employment status

- Current learning status

END OF INTERVIEW

Timeline

Key events in your work and learning

Childhood   Now   The future
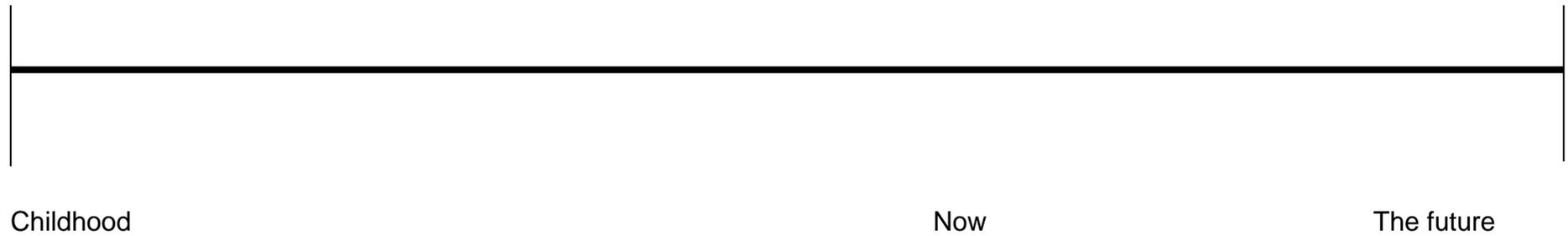
Key events in your non-work life

Prison topic guide

This version of the topic guide has been revised following the main stage pilot. The prison pilot visit was scheduled for 24 January 2013.

Introduction to the research

- Introduce self and IES (independent research organisation).

- Remind respondent that he/she had opted-in to the research, but re-iterate that participation is voluntary and they can opt-out at any time.

- Introduce the research. The aim is to interview people making choices about their work and learning. This can involve choices relating to learning, trying to find work, your job or more generally about your career.

The interview will cover

■ your past experiences of work and learning

■ how you have made/are making choices about or changes to work and learning

■ sources of information and support that you have used and found helpful when making choices about work and learning and how important they are

---

- The research is for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (the government department that looks after careers advice for adults) and will contribute to understanding how people make work and learning choices and the services and support they need to help them.

- Explain about confidentiality and likely length of discussion (approx. one hour).

- Explain about audio-recording, remind them of the desirability of recording the interview and seek permission to record.

- Remind them of the arrangements for ensuring security of personal information ie: **All** information collected will be kept by the research team and will remain confidential until it is destroyed six months after completion of the project. **No research papers or reports will name you or identify you in any way**. All views will be reported anonymously. No personal information will be shared with BIS, NOMS or other organisations, without your express permission.

- State clearly, that there is one key exception to confidentiality: READ OUT THE FOLLOWING:

> Researchers are under a duty to disclose certain information to the Prison Service. This includes behaviour that is against prison rules and can be adjudicated against (see Section 51 of the Prison Rules 1999), illegal acts, and behaviour that is harmful to the research participant (e.g. intention to self-harm or complete suicide).

- Ask if they have any questions/clarifications about the research and then ask to sign the consent form. Remind them that if they have any questions, queries or concerns about the research they can also contact [name of agreed relevant prison staff member].

1. Career history: timeline approach

We would like to use this timeline to discuss key events in your career/life history – including your work, learning and any family or other circumstances that have affected the work and learning you have done.

Could we start with when you left school or college, and work up to where you are now.

We can mark work and learning activities and periods above the line and key family, social and other life events below the line. Could you talk me through the events as you/we mark them down? If you want to, you can include how events made you feel with regard to learning and work. It would be helpful if we could include any other periods in custody[5].

Respondent/interviewer to mark key points on the timeline.
Could you talk me through the events as you/we mark them down?
Probe for the following types of events/changes/choices[6] made:

- qualifications gained and periods and modes of learning (where the learning took place and whether part-time, full-time or distance learning).

- work history (type of work undertaken; full/part-time etc).

- any periods out of paid work.

- any periods of prolonged ill-health.

- voluntary or community work.

- periods in and out of custody (if happy to discuss this).

- caring commitments (children and/or other relatives).

- moving area (and/or moving prisons).

---

[5] INTERVIEWER NOTE: Understanding periods in custody is particularly helpful. For many prisoners, there will be significant feelings of failure and rejection which will affect subsequent decisions that they make. Clearly current decisions will be impacted by their current status – and, probably, real and perceived opportunities.

[6] INTERVIEWER NOTE: when in custody prisoners may not have a choice, depending on their circumstances, so please tailor the language appropriately.

As respondents talk through their history, probe for the following

A: Probe for factors of influence:

What were/are you considering when making that change?

> *Probe the following as appropriate to whether in/out of custody: the learning and careers support available in prison, previous work experience and work record, the kinds of jobs available, geographical location, the type of work or training which interests me, the skills I'm good at, my qualifications, future opportunities/employment, funding and finance, work/life balance and family life, what my friends think, the potential for moving to another prison, approaching the end of my sentence (if relevant)/time left to serve.*

What is the relative importance of each of these?

B: Probe for sources of information and support

At the times people are thinking about their work/learning choices we would like to collect details about the information, advice and support they used. Please use the following set of questions about sources of information and support at any relevant point within the timeline discussion. Please note the differences in the types of sources of support available during times in and out of custody.

Did you get any advice/information/support at that time?
>   Did you talk to…..?

>   Did you look at….?

> ***Probe for periods IN custody***: *friends and family, National Careers Service face-to-face contact or 'virtual campus' (where available[7]), Careers Information and Advice Service (prior to 2012), job adverts, fellow prisoners, prison staff, chaplaincy and agency staff (including the education provider and, e.g. drugs and behavioural advisors/counsellors, books, teachers, careers professionals, and general information (TV, papers).*

> ***Probe for periods OUT of custody***: *friends and family, National Careers Service (web, telephone, face-to-face), job adverts, colleagues, books, social networks, teachers, careers professionals, employer/work colleagues, learning provider (eg college), advice provided/paid for by an employer in a redundancy situation, general information (TV, papers, internet), online social media and forums*

---

[7]   NOTE TO INTERVIEWER: *Virtual campus is a computer based resource providing CV building support and access to job search in real time. It is not available in all prisons yet.*

What questions did you have? (What were you hoping to find out? What did you need to know? What did you need help with?)

How useful did you find it? How did it help you?

What other sources of information and support were you aware of, but didn't use? Why? [Note potential access issues here if accessing services while in custody]

> *Probe: nextstep (pre 2010), learndirect (pre 2010), nextstep and Careers Advice Service (2010-12), Careers Information and Advice Service, National Careers Service face-to-face contact or 'virtual campus' from 2012 onwards, and any other careers support available in prisons (prior to the National Careers Service).*

What gaps did you find in the support on offer?

What else would you have found helpful? Why?

The future

> After you have discussed their current situation and circumstances (reached NOW on the timeline), we want the respondent to think about the future

What are your goals for the future?

Probe for:

- short-term goals (timeframe/ie whether these are goals for whilst in custody or for after the end of their sentence).

- longer-term goals (timeframe/ie whether these are goals for whilst in custody or for after the end of their sentence).

What do you see happening next?

What might help you achieve what you want? What might hold you back?

2. Reflections

What are the most important things you would look for from work?

Explain that people find different things important, for example: steady employment and security, variety, autonomy, challenge, financial rewards, social status, helping others, influence, social aspects of work.

Is there one thing you would need more than anything else from work?

In the process of thinking about work/learning (and making changes to these aspects of your life) what have you learned:

Probe: about yourself; your priorities; the labour market; your career direction.

Has what is important to you changed over time?

What sources of information, advice or support have been most useful to you in thinking about or making choices about work and learning?

Have your views on where you might look for information or support changed over time and why? (if answers are too general, probe for 'information, advice or support to help make changes to work or learning patterns or to think about these things and the choices you have?')

What level of detail do you find useful in the information you use to make choices?
Probe for work information: *level of earnings, qualifications required, progression opportunities, availability of local vacancies*
Probe for learning information: *course content, assessment methods, cost, timing, progression opportunities to further learning, which job roles require the qualification*

What have you learned about how to make (future) work/learning choices/changes?

How would you describe how you make work/learning choices/changes?

How has the way you make work/learning choices changed over your life?

Looking back, is there anything you would have done differently in your work/learning? Why is that?

What work/learning choices or changes do you think you might make in the future?

Do you think you will approach these differently from past ones?

What sources of information and support do you think you will need to help you?

What advice would you pass on to someone about to make a decision about their work, learning or career?

Is there anything else you'd like to add about making work and learning choices?

3. Background details

Check for the purposes of analysis that you have the following pieces of information about the respondent. *NB: no need to ask questions if already covered elsewhere (e.g. during the discussion of the timeline)*

- Highest level of qualification

- Age

- Gender

- Previous employment status

- Current learning status

- Previous periods in custody, length of current sentence (or time left to serve). *INTERVIEWER NOTE: Advise interviewees that they do not need to provide this information but that it does help us to understand better how periods in custody affect people's work and learning choices.*

END OF INTERVIEW

> Thank you very much
>
> Remind about confidentiality and use of data, and our duty to disclose certain information to the Prison Service – behaviour that is against prison rules, illegal acts, and behaviour that is harmful to the research participant (e.g. intention to self-harm or commit suicide)
>
> Remind them that if they any questions or queries about the research they can also contact [name of agreed relevant prison staff member].

Overview of Ipsos-MORI customer segmentation

The segmentation was designed on the basis of research which aimed to: investigate the diversity of needs that exist with regard to engaging in substantiated and progressive employment and learning; and identify the motivations and other characteristics of the segments that would affect their engagement with the NCS.[8]

Figure 2.2: Customer segmentation in relation to the direction and distance to an individual goal and Table A1 below present the main features of the Ipsos MORI segmentation model, which developed six customer types.

Table A.1: Overview of the Ipsos-MORI model segment characteristics

Segment	Characteristics
On track	See the relevance of learning / skills development to their situation
	Maintaining skills / engaged in learning to develop within existing career
Transitional	Have a clear goal for their future career / life
	Acknowledge a skills gap between current situation and their goal
	See the relevance of learning / skills development to their situation
	Changing career / Moving out of unemployment / Returning to work
Fixated	Have a career goal for their future career / life
	Not acknowledging the relevance of skills development
	Reluctant to reconsider their goal
	Not succeeding in moving toward aspiration
	No plan as to how aspiration would be achieved
Would if I could	Acknowledge need to address skills / learning would improve life
	Not sure how to access appropriate help
	Believe that opportunities exist to improve their situation
Trapped	No clear goal for their future career / life
	Low confidence
	Not engaged in learning / skills development
	Low belief that opportunity exists to take control of life
Dispirited	Have engaged in previous skills / learning, but faced setbacks and currently disengaged

Source: Ipsos-MORI, 2009, p14

---

[8]   Then the Adult Advancement and Careers Service.

Overview of MINDSPACE framework

Table A.2: MINDSPACE: a checklist of influences on behaviour when making policy

Messenger	We are heavily influenced by who communicates information
Incentives	When responding to incentives, we are loss averse and strongly discount the future
Norms	We tend to do what those around us are already doing
Defaults	We 'go with the flow' of pre-set options
Salience	Our attention is drawn to what is novel and seems relevant to us
Priming	Our acts are often influenced by sub-conscious cues
Affect	Emotional associations can powerfully shape our actions
Commitments	We seek to be consistent with our public promises, and reciprocate acts
Ego	We act in ways that make us feel better about ourselves

Source: Dolan at al., 2010, p8

Messenger: We are heavily influenced by who communicates information – **the messenger**. We are influenced by the perceived authority of the messenger; people are more likely to act on information if experts deliver it. It has also been shown that demographic and behavioural similarities between the expert and the recipient can improve the effectiveness of the intervention and that individuals can discard advice given by someone they dislike. Therefore someone who has developed a dislike of 'government' interventions may be less likely to listen to a message that they perceive to come from government (Dolan et al., 2010).

Incentives: When responding to **incentives** we dislike losses more than we like gains of an equivalent amount; we overweight small probabilities; we discount the future and live for today at the expense of tomorrow (hyperbolic discounting). This results in a discount rate which can vary between individuals (Darnton, 2008). The decision made by an individual will depend on how the available choices are presented (framing). Framing the decision in terms of losses instead of gains, or putting items in a different order, can influence the decision that is made (Darnton, 2008). Evidence also suggests that monetary compensation can devalue the intrinsic worth of an activity and that we tend to allocate money to discrete bundles to be used for specific purposes (Dolan et al., 2010).

Norms: Social **norms** are the behavioural expectations within a society or group and they can influence an individual's actions in both positive and negative ways. People often take their understanding of norms from the behaviour of others. Social networks can therefore be used to bring about behaviour change that passes through groups and communities (Dolan et al., 2010).

Defaults: **Defaults** are the options that are pre-selected if an individual in a decision-making context does not make a choice. The evidence suggests that we often 'go with the flow' of pre-set options. When faced with a difficult decision or one involving too much

choice, people may choose not to change their behaviour, or to go with the easiest option (**inertia**) (Darnton, 2008).

Salience: Our behaviour is greatly influenced by what our attention is drawn to, and we are likely to be drawn to what seems novel or relevant to us: things that have salience. We are more likely to be drawn to what we can understand and what confirms our existing views (confirmation bias) as we filter out much information as a coping strategy to deal with information overload (Dolan et al., 2010).

Priming: **Priming** shows that people's subsequent behaviour may be altered if they are first exposed to certain sights, words or sensations. However, this is the least well understood of the MINDSPACE effects (Dolan et al., 2010).

Affect: Emotional associations can powerfully shape our actions and therefore moods rather than deliberate decisions can influence judgements (**affect**) (Dolan et al., 2010).

Commitment: We seek to be consistent with our public promises, and reciprocity is particularly important to **commitment** (Dolan et al., 2010).

Ego: We act in ways that make us feel better about ourselves and appeal to our **ego**. When things go well we attribute it to ourselves and when they go badly we think it's the fault of other people. It has also been shown that the greater the expectation placed on people the better they perform (Dolan et al., 2010). People tend to be over-confident and optimistic and think bad things won't happen to them (Thaler and Sunstein, 2009). For example, entrepreneurs tend to think that it won't be their business that fails. When beliefs and behaviour are in conflict, it is often beliefs that are changed rather than behaviour. However, small and easy changes to behaviour can lead to subsequent changes in behaviour that may go largely unnoticed, challenging the common belief that we should seek to change attitudes in order to change behaviour.