



Career Connect



Impact Report

2024/25

Welcome to our Impact Report for 2024/25

Sheila Clark, CEO, Career Connect



Welcome to our impact report for 2024/25. It demonstrates how we have continued to drive forward our vision and reach, supporting young people and adults to make progress in their lives.

This includes supporting 12,881 adults through our justice services contracts (in 2024/25 we worked in 18 UK prisons); providing tailored careers services to 51,000 young people across 245 schools; delivering careers training and continuing professional development to 221 people from a diverse range of organisations; and providing tracking and support services to a further 43,273 young people.

That means we have delivered our high-quality, professional support services to 107,375 people, an increase of 10% year-on-year!

The last year has been significant for our Charity's profile as a voice for the people we support and for the wider careers sector. This included holding a roundtable event at the House of Lords with key partners, stakeholders and parliamentarians on the critical issue of the economic value of careers guidance. Building on this, we delivered a regional best practice event with our eight Local Authority delivery areas, sharing what works in services for young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) and those at risk of NEET.

We have continued to grow across the Northwest and are privileged to have been

awarded the contract for delivery of the new programme working with offenders in custody and in the community on release, HMPPS Creating Future Opportunities Evolution.

Our schools and colleges team continues to deliver programmes that reflect the latest changes in the careers landscape, and that inspire and inform. Our young people's teams have collaborated or led programmes designed to meet need, such as the Caring Business Charter in Sefton, and Discover Your Future in Salford.

We are further developing our training offer, by thinking creatively about how we can use our expertise to empower others. We're proud to continue our relationship with the Careers and Enterprise Company, delivering Careers Leaders training across the country.

Reflecting our commitment to our people, we made it into not one, but three of the UK's Top 100 Best Companies to Work For lists – Best Large Companies, Best Charities and Best Northwest Companies.

To have achieved the level of impact we have in 2024/25, and over our five-year strategy, is thanks to years of hard work and planning, the dedication and expertise of our people, the support and guidance of our Board – and from embracing opportunity and innovation.

Looking ahead, we have engaged our Trustees, partners, stakeholders and our people to develop our new strategy, setting our compass for 2025–28.

Our vision,

mission and values

We seek to empower, educate and support individuals, communities and organisations in all aspects of the career journey.

Our services are delivered by professional and experienced teams across the following areas:

- Employment, Education and Training support to offenders and ex-offenders.

- Professional careers guidance and employer encounters in schools.
- Support for young people who are at risk of, or are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), reaching those who are vulnerable or from under-served groups.
- Fully accessible, accredited training programmes and CPD courses run face-to-face or digitally.

Our Vision

A society where every individual realises their full potential.



Our Mission

To drive social mobility by enabling more people to access and succeed in education, training and employment.



Our Values

Inclusive: we believe diversity is a strength and each person should be supported to achieve the best possible outcomes, irrespective of their background.

Professional: we are passionate about our work; we are highly skilled and knowledgeable, working with integrity to achieve results.

Person-centred: we care about people as individuals, we advise and advocate on their behalf so that they can achieve their goals.

Impartial: we work independently as a charity, to broaden horizons and help people to find an opportunity that's right for them.

Aspirational: we are committed to raising aspirations and achieving a greater level of social mobility.

Our reach and impact

In 2024/25, we have:



Supported

12,881



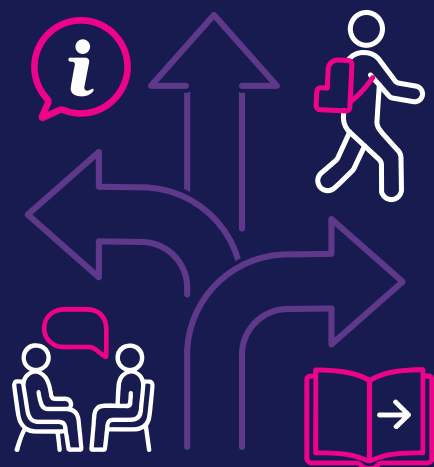
participants

in the **criminal justice**
system to move
towards a **new path**

Provided **careers information,**
advice and **guidance** to

51,000 students

across **245 schools**
and **colleges**



Provided **tracking** and **support services** for

43,273

young people



across **eight local authorities**, with **substantive support** provided to **28,605 young people**



Enrolled

221 learners

on **accredited** and **non-accredited courses** delivered by our **Training and Development team**

Generated an **additional** $+$ $+$ $+$ **social value** of

£8.8m



That's a total of



107,375

people

benefiting from **Career Connect's support and expertise**



Image: Liverpool Careers Fair.

Participant voice: from **feedback** to **action**

At the heart of our work is our commitment to listening to the people we support — and acting on what they tell us.

Over the past year, we've further embedded a structured, three-tiered model of participation across both youth and adult services. This model spans from consultation to co-production and participant-led initiatives, ensuring everyone has a meaningful say in shaping the support they receive.

Tools that drive change

We continue to use the Lundy Model of Participation in daily practice and the Hear by Right framework to embed participation at an organisational level. In October 2024, we

launched a new Participant Voice Survey. This app-based tool captures insights directly from participants. Unlike traditional feedback, it focuses on journeys, goals, and support needs, helping us understand what truly matters.

In our young people's services alone, we've gathered more than 112 new participant voices, uncovering priorities like mental health, budgeting, and transport barriers.

Youth Ambassadors leading the way

Since April 2024, nine Youth Ambassadors have joined our team.

Our ambassadors have influenced projects ranging from website and branding — suggesting that we add staff images and information to build trust—to helping shape our 2025–2028 strategic plan. They also

Main image: Our Youth Ambassadors represented youth voices at our Local Authority stakeholder workshop.

represented youth voices at our Local Authority stakeholder workshop in October 2024.

Youth participation in action

Each operational team has led at least one dedicated participation project, varying from consultative to collaborative. Examples include:

Liverpool Careers Fair: Fourteen young people took part in an online survey and focus group, sharing their views on industries of interest, the type of support they needed, and how the event should run. The Liverpool team designed the fair to include more employer engagement, CV support, and practical workshops. Including young people from the very start led to more tailored, relevant outcomes.

Transport barriers in Salford: Through group discussions in Salford, young people shared how travel anxiety and poor transport links limit access to programmes. Their feedback is now shaping how we plan locations and implement travel training.

Voice Champions Network

Our Voice Champions Network is now active across both youth and justice services and meets bi-monthly to share insights and co-ordinate actions. Nine champions represent all key operational teams in youth services, and seven champions represent our adult justice services contracts.

Embedding participation within adult services

We've begun work on a Participant Voice Charter for our adult-facing services. We're also designing an adult Participant Voice Survey, collaborating with Voice Champions to ensure questions are meaningful and capture the issues most relevant to participants.

We've involved justice service participants in the wording of a new resilience assessment tool focused on goal setting, communication, and optimism for the future, helping to shape something that genuinely reflects their needs and language.

Focus groups for our adult justice participants have also led to tangible improvements across prison services:

- **HGV training:** Delivered in response to participant interest in rehabilitation and employment
- **Group sessions:** Expanded into larger spaces to increase access
- **Support networks:** CFO and peer mentors are enhancing communication and wing-based support
- **Environment and delivery:** Participants helped rebrand rooms, refine phased delivery, and define orderly roles
- **Wing timetable:** Discussions focused on sessions participants find most useful, enabling the team to keep timetables relevant and focused on skills that aid successful transition back into the community

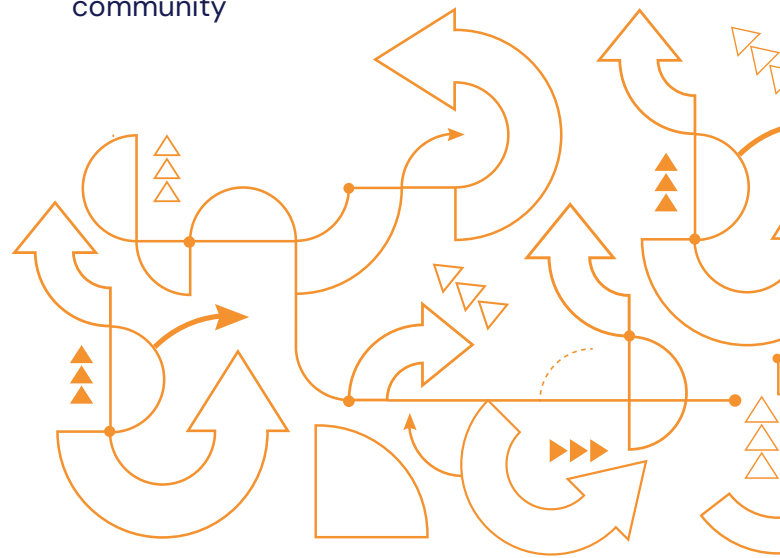


Image: Focus group with young people in St Helens on their experiences of recruitment and employer engagement.



Justice Services: helping people to find their way forward

Justice Services

We continue to grow in reach and reputation in the justice sector. Our Achieve justice teams engaged with 12,881 participants, helping them to overcome barriers, explore new paths and prepare for employment, education or training.

We worked across 14 prisons in the Northwest, four prisons in the North Midlands, six CFO Activity Hubs, and our Community Support Workers were attached to 14 probation offices.

CFO Evolution

In June 2024, and following a competitive tender process, we began delivery of the HMPPS Creating Future Opportunities (CFO) Evolution contract Northwest. The contract runs to 2027.



CFO Evolution is not a standalone programme but is designed to complement and support core HMPPS provision. Career Connect delivers alongside partner and key sub-contractor The Growth Company.

The team had 2,581 approved cases in this first year across 14 Northwest prisons, six CFO Activity Hubs and community locations (August 2024 – April 2025). Performance is steadily building, and our team's support has helped our participants to achieve 1,337 education, training and employment outcomes.

Greater Manchester Education, Training and Employment (GM ETE)

Career Connect's Achieve team delivers GM ETE on behalf of the Greater Manchester Combined

Authority (GMCA) and His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), as part of the Greater Manchester Integrated Rehabilitative Services (GMIRS).

In the last 12 months, the team has continued delivery in 10 probation offices across the Greater Manchester region and three Northwest prisons. They received 3,728 referrals to the programme. Over the last 12 months they have helped move 267 people on probation into employment and/or self-employment and 364 people into education or training.

Careers Information Advice and Guidance (CIAG) North Midlands

This contract ended on March 31, 2025, after successful delivery. Our advisers were based in four prisons, preparing men for release, and giving them the knowledge and skills to move forward and achieve their chosen career goals. We made suitable referrals to other partners and agencies to continue their support where needed.

We are pleased to have been awarded the follow up, expanded contract for East Midlands Prison Careers Information, Advice and Guidance Services.

The service will begin in April 2025, including 13 prisons – nine more than the previous North Midlands contract.

CIAG Lancashire and Cumbria

In the last 12 months we continued our delivery of this contract in six prisons across Lancashire and Cumbria. Our professional CIAG advisers worked with offenders in custody from the start of their sentence, up to preparing for release, with the aim of helping to prevent cycles of re-offending. The team also worked with partners to make suitable referrals.

We have held CIAG contracts with Lancashire and Cumbria Prisons since 2020, and in April 2025 we will begin a new contract including an extra prison.

Case Study

Peer mentors shine at HMP Wymott

Lancashire and Cumbria CIAG

HMP Wymott has seen a significant boost in engagement and progress amongst the prison population thanks to the work of two peer mentors, whose contributions have been widely praised by both staff and senior leadership.

Their role includes engaging individuals on the prison wing in meaningful, supportive conversations, signposting to appropriate activities and learning opportunities and providing hands-on support with CVs and other practical tasks.

As part of our ongoing commitment to developing peer-led support, the mentors at HMP Wymott are currently undertaking the Level 2 qualification in Information, Advice or Guidance.

This nationally-recognised qualification equips individuals with the skills and knowledge to provide effective, ethical, and person-centred careers support to their peers.

Mentors receive structured and consistent support from the team. This includes:

- Guided IAG workbook completion, with Career Connect's CIAG advisers providing tailored assistance to help mentors understand and apply key concepts
- Regular one-to-one progress meetings, offering a space for reflection, feedback, and encouragement
- Ongoing mentoring and coaching, fostering confidence and reinforcing the practical application of CIAG principles within the prison environment



What the peer mentors say

"Before this, I didn't think I had anything to offer. Now I'm supporting others and building skills I can use when I leave here."

Mentor, HMP Wymott

"It's not just about the qualification — it's about the confidence and belief it's given me. I feel like I'm making a difference."

Mentor, HMP Wymott

Ant Bigley, Team Manager for Lancashire & Cumbria CIAG said:

"We are confident that the skills developed through this qualification will have a lasting impact beyond the prison gates. Senior prison leaders have recognised the programme's role in improving engagement, motivation, and outcomes across the establishment."

Peer mentors help Tony

Tony worked closely with Career Connect's CIAG advisers and peer mentors before his release, with the mentors playing a key role in providing support and motivation during his preparations.

Tony developed the motivation to undertake voluntary work at a foodbank while he looked for post-release employment. With support from the CIAG team, Tony was then able to secure a job with a courier service that aligned with his license conditions and personal goals, and which he was able to start soon after release. He remains in employment and is doing well.

**Not participant's real name*

Case Study

The Summit Wing: tailored and transformative

The Summit Wing at HMP Lancaster Farms was launched in October 2024, commissioned by HMPPS CFO Evolution and delivered by Career Connect.

The programme enrolls male offenders, including 21–29-year-olds under IPP (Imprisonment for Public Protection); life sentence holders; Category D fails; and those recalled to custody.

As such, it is designed to provide structure, while being flexible enough to support participants individually, wherever they are in their journey.



The programme provides practical employability support while equipping participants to navigate services in custody or in preparation for resettlement. This is alongside a focus on positive behaviours, mindset, consistent standards, and a sense of community and peer support.

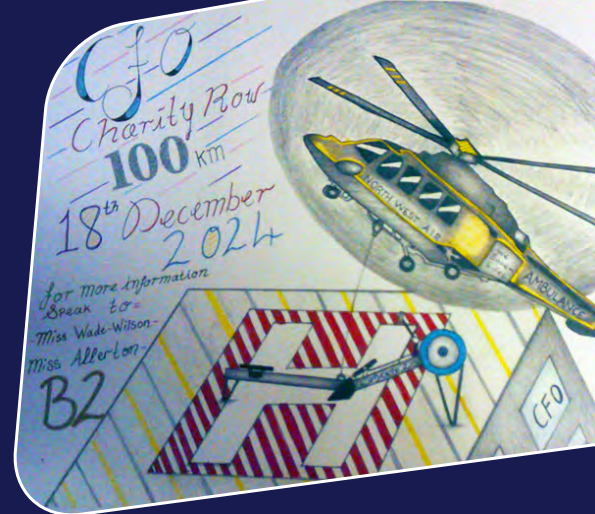
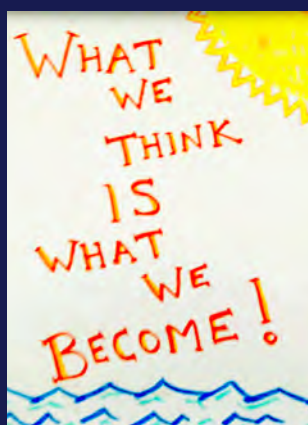


Image: Participant artwork

While there is no specific criterion for aggression, most participants have indicators suggesting this needs to be addressed. Alongside specific sessions on positive behaviours and managing aggression, these skills are embedded across the programme.

The Summit Wing's innovative staffing model prioritises consistency and contact time. A dedicated team of three CFO Support Workers and one Senior CFO Support Worker deliver group sessions and regular one-to-one support before, during, and after completion.

Supporting neurodivergent individuals is a focus. Many participants have undiagnosed needs, which are addressed through adaptive, inclusive techniques. Two peer mentors have been trained to support others with reading and writing, while building their own skills. The programme incorporates participant voices to develop a motivational timetable, to support engagement and ownership of positive change.

Sessions include:

- CV writing, interview techniques and mock interviews
- Barriers to work and self-employment/benefits (with DWP)
- Employability: career goals, skills and participant awareness of what offences may restrict from certain roles
- Insights into construction and waste management roles (led by CFO Evolution Employment Engagement Lead)
- Renting and Approved Premises awareness
- Money management
- In-prison employer events

Charity initiatives, led by the participants, have included a rowing event that raised over £600 for Air Ambulance.

Collaboration helps participants to access diverse support. External sessions include Breakthrough Recovery Chorley Group and DWP. The team also refers individuals to workshops at Recycling Lives, with opportunities to apply for employment upon release.

Each cohort ends with an 'All About CFO' session, offering participants the chance to reflect, express gratitude, and share how the experience has impacted them.

To support long term outcomes, the Summit Wing team builds strong relationships with community services. This includes detailed pre-release handovers to a CFO Activity Hub or Community CFO Support Worker, alongside in-work support.

Impact

The results have been strong.

From October 2024 to the end of March 2025, 48 participants enrolled, with a high completion rate of 34. Outcomes have included placements with Recycling Lives, job offers from Future Skills Programme and roles with a major bakery chain.

Meanwhile, those serving longer sentences have shown increased motivation to explore their future and improved self-management of behaviour.

Participant voices:

"I feel like I'm finally on the right path and your support and guidance has helped me get there."

"This course has helped me to understand myself a little more, whilst enabling myself to grow and it has given me the tools to regulate my emotions better than I used to."

"CFO changed me for the best."

"Halfway through phase two we had a lot of people coming in from outside and they were talking about DWP, housing and Breakthrough Recovery. It was all really useful."



This programme is funded by HMPPS CFO



A partner in **preparing** students for their **future**

Our work with schools and colleges continues to go from strength to strength.

Working in mainstream schools, specialist and alternative provision settings, our team provides high quality, tailored Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) services to meet individual needs and aspirations of students.

In 2024/2025 we have:

- Worked with 245 schools and colleges (a 14% increase from 214 in 2023/24), providing high quality careers guidance services to more than 50,000 young people
- Provided targeted employability sessions to 10,350 young people and created over

850 employer links to provide activities including work experience, employer sessions, work-related activities, and mock interviews

- Arranged 25 careers and transition fairs and 10 events to share information with parents
- Delivered bespoke employer encounter programmes to more than 30 schools, across all key stages
- Involved more than 120 organisations in our delivery, helping to raise aspirations of students and improve outcomes

Our innovative digital CEIAG platform Get Connected Plus has been successful in supporting SEND settings to engage young people with the Personal Development curriculum.

We also shared our expertise with careers professionals across the country with CPD sessions on the updated Gatsby Benchmarks.



Image: Careers fair at Henry Box School, Oxfordshire.

Extended partnership with MacIntyre Academies

MacIntyre Academies, a Multi-Academy Trust for special schools and specialist alternative provision, commissioned us to extend delivery of our Inspiring Futures programme across their Quest, Discovery, and Venture Academies. This includes work-related activities tailored for student and cohort needs, weekly attendance and delivery at each academy, employer-specific activities, and additional support for parents, carers and families.

Since the start of the project, we have reached more than 170 young people, ranging from one-to-one meetings and employer visits to in-school events. Activity has included:

- Arranging 12 employer visits
- Hosting 9 career fairs with between 10–20 exhibitors in attendance at each
- Supporting 7 parents' and transition events
- Sourcing 65 work experience opportunities
- Making available 25 additional CEIAG resources to enhance careers and employability activities.

Growing Quality in Careers Standard

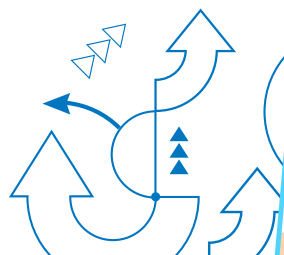
Our success as a licenced provider of the Quality in Careers Standard continues to be an area of growth, with 30 new schools and colleges starting the award in 2024/25.

Our team also successfully piloted and achieved endorsement from the Quality in Careers Standard to deliver the Career Connect Primary Quality Award for Careers Related Learning. We delivered a successful pilot in Eccleston Lane Ends Primary School in St Helens (pictured below).



We also continued working with Co-op Academies Trust to provide the Quality in Careers Standard and Primary Quality Award across their Academies (38 in total). **Jo Sykes, Director of CEIAG at Co-Op Academies said:**

“The support our academies receive is on an individual basis and is professional, transparent and targeted to ensure appropriate evidence is collated to demonstrate the high-quality career provision. The feedback for our academies has been fantastic as they feel the support is considered and appropriate, from an initial introductory meeting to the completion of the assessment.”



Case Study

Engaging families with careers

North Ridge High School is an 11–19 special school in North Manchester, with 200 students across two sites. Career Connect adviser and team leader Steve Leach has been working with the school since 2019.

“Each of our students is unique, and there is not just one way of working with anybody,” says Elaine Redpath, Assistant Headteacher and Careers Lead.

“For most of our students, support is more about providing exposure to provision and employers, and liaising with families, some of whom can face lots of challenges. This includes practical support with applications.

“We provide a wraparound family service, placing the needs and goals of the young person above everything else. It’s part of our ethos. It’s good to work with Steve knowing that he feels the same.

“Steve and I have built useful resources for families and staff, including a PowerPoint with information on local provision.

“Our family information days have been one of our success stories. In line with preparing our students for adulthood, we bring employers, training and education provision together with health, wellbeing, and others to support young people in every aspect. Our first event attracted 20 families, and we now welcome at least 50.

“Making the transition to a new setting – whether in year 11 or year 14 – can cause a lot of anxiety for students and their families. Steve



is excellent at being a calming presence and engaging them with the process of change.

“We can also face challenges in that the provision that a young person or their family wants or needs doesn’t always exist, may not be available, or is not the right fit. The young person may need to take a different route to achieve their goal. Steve is very good in preparing young people for this and helping them to understand that ‘this is your starting point – it’s not your end point’.

“Steve is also persistent in helping our students find post-16 and post-19 places. We are proud to achieve a near 100% participation rate every year.

“Steve works with our Enterprise Adviser to seek out employer activities that bring careers to life – such as bringing in giant metal casing frames for an electrical wiring activity. Our students felt a real sense of achievement.

“Steve has led on putting together a clear careers framework for years 7–9, and careers curriculum mapped against the CDI framework. He played a big role in our achieving the Quality in Careers Standard.

“We were proud to achieve ‘Outstanding’ in our last Ofsted inspection – where they spent a lot of time looking at careers provision.

“Next, we want to promote careers conversations across the whole school – from teachers, to site staff, to governors. Steve will play a key role in helping drive this – he’s an essential part of our team.”

Case Study

Challenging stereotypes and opening doors

Liverpool-based Bellerive FCJ Catholic College was the venue for our popular Challenging Stereotypes event, as our schools and colleges team showcased the breadth of careers available to 160 Year 9 girls choosing their GCSE options.

Building on our strong relationships with employers, we brought together female professionals from the civil service, NHS, construction, engineering, His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service, Merseyside Police, and Career Connect, to play a key role.

Each of the professionals appeared first in their non-work clothes. Designed to encourage interaction and discovery, students were challenged to work as teams and guess each person's job and industry by asking 'yes' and 'no' questions.



After a short break, the professionals changed into their usual workwear, revealed their job roles, and shared personal insights into their career journeys – leading to a few surprises for the students.

Jessie Brown, a construction site manager at



Morgan Sindall, said: "The enthusiasm from the students was infectious throughout the day.



"Everyone was eager to participate and learn about the different career opportunities available. The energy in the room was contagious, and it was clear that everyone was having fun while also gaining valuable insights into the different roles. It was great to see the students surprised to learn that I work in the construction industry. Their genuine interest and eagerness to learn more about the opportunities available for women in this field was exciting to see."

Bellerive FCJ Catholic College Headteacher, Peter Forsey said: "The college has been working with Career Connect for the last 10 years, and we have found them to be supportive and responsive partners who have allowed us to take our careers education to a higher level.

"This event has run incredibly successfully each year and has grown and evolved in response to our ever-changing society. Its benefits include expanding students' horizons for the roles and opportunities outside of school and providing clear pathways to empower and inspire the next generation."

Empowering young people to thrive



We have continued to deliver tracking and personalised careers support to young people across eight local authorities: Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool, Manchester, Salford, Sefton, St Helens and Wirral.

Liverpool City Region

Our Liverpool team:

- Supported and tracked 5,234 young people across the city, helping place 1,568 into employment, education or training.
- Welcomed 60 young people who were NEET to a Liverpool Career Opportunities Event in Toxteth, linking them with employers and CV workshops.



- Collaborated with Liverpool City Council to identify provision for young people suffering from anxiety and/or mental health issues. This resulted in supporting 40 young people onto the online programme, Creative Gym.
- Supported 45 young people in gaining a CSCS card – with several moving into a positive destination and others starting college.



Our Wirral team:

- Supported and tracked 2,469 young people, helping place 508 into employment, education or training.
- Collaborated with Wirral Council and partners to host a job fair (March 2025), which saw 589 young people register. The team focussed on careers advice

and supporting attendees to navigate application processes. As a result: 65% received career advice; 57% were given information about apprenticeships; 19% were offered a training course enrolment; 8% were offered a job interview; 7% were offered a work placement; 5% were given self-employment advice; 3% were offered a job.



Image: Wirral Job Fair.

Our Halton team:

- Supported and tracked 910 young people, helping place 165 into employment, education or training.
- Continued to work in partnership with local schools and Halton Council supporting Year 11 young people identified as at risk of being NEET into education, employment and training.
- With Career Connect's Participation Co-ordinator, facilitated a consultation session with 15 young people on behalf of Halton Council, with the task of creating a new name for the council's 14-19 Team.

Our Knowsley team:

- Tracked or supported 2,323 young people, helping place 381 into employment, education or training.
- Supported 150 Year 11 young people at risk of NEET, with 85% of those progressing into a positive destination.
- Worked with Street League and Oatlands to encourage young people's engagement and confidence in accessing provision.

- Referred young people to housing association LIV Housing, which led to several gaining a CSCS card and work experience and some being offered apprenticeships.



- Worked with Merseyside Youth Association in supporting a group of young people to participate in outdoor team-building activities on Lord Derby's Knowsley Estate. The activity helped participants to build evidence for an Open Employability Award.

Our St Helens team:

- Tracked or supported 4,345 young people across St Helens, helping place 404 into employment, education or training.
- Was successful in the tender process for a new contract with St Helens Council, with delivery starting in February 2025.
- Performed highly, engaging on a monthly basis with 82% of young people who were NEET – well above the Northwest rate of 42%. The team's tracking and engagement of young people with SEN is also classed as outstanding.
- Worked with 50% more young people at risk of NEET than in the previous 2023 cohort (2024 School Leavers team).
- Led a session with six youth justice participants and six young people who were NEET, consulting on their experience of recruitment and employer engagement.

Our Sefton team:

- Tracked 12,000 and supported 6,758 young people, helping place 434 into employment, education or training.

- Worked with 1,394 young people under 16 who are at risk of NEET. This included vulnerable groups, Cared For, SEN, young people with SEMH (social, emotional and mental health) needs, and school non-attenders.
- Worked with more than 150 care experienced young people. The team also recruited an apprentice who was care experienced, as part of the Sefton Caring Business Charter.
- Launched the Multiply project Count on You, offering targeted one-to-one support to develop numeracy skills, improve basic maths and household budgeting. 42 young people and adults aged 19+ participated in the programme, with 22 (52%) of those being care experienced; of which six (27%) were supported into employment, education or training by Career Connect and Sefton@Work through paid placements. All six were long-term unemployed older care leavers with complex needs.
- Delivered the Turnaround Project in collaboration with Hugh Baird College. This needs-based employability and study programme aligned bespoke provision with highly targeted, holistic support. Responding to gaps in local provision, it addressed hyper-local needs of young people aged 16-17 who were furthest away from the labour market. A successful pilot with 100% success rate led to a further 45 new places, and the launch of Engage, an online offer for young people who are NEET and with SEN needs and working with CAMHS. In total, 69 new, bespoke learning pathways were created for young people, with a focus on being work-ready.



Case Study

Sefton Caring Business Charter

Transforming outcomes for care experienced young people

Career Connect played a leading role in a new multi-agency partnership supporting care-experienced young people into education, employment, or training (EET).

Launched in 2022 by Sefton Council, The Caring Business Charter —the first initiative of its kind in the Northwest — brings together local businesses and care-experienced young people. Career Connect was among the first signatories, alongside Sefton@Work, Merseycare NHS Foundation Trust, The King's Trust, and other local employers.

The Charter encourages businesses to provide quality opportunities such as guaranteed interviews, work experience, paid roles, and apprenticeships. To date, 65 organisations across construction, hospitality, healthcare, and project management have joined, helping create inclusive and sustainable pathways into work and training for care-experienced young people.

Alongside the Charter, Career Connect delivers targeted support through:

- **NEET Reduction and Early Intervention Service (NREIS):** Delivered on behalf of Sefton Council, providing outreach, tracking, information, advice, guidance, and mentoring.
- **Multiply: Count on You:** A bespoke numeracy programme focused on budgeting and life skills, delivered by trained Career Connect advisers.
- **Pre-Employment Programme:** Three weeks of classroom-based employability training (in partnership with Merseycare and The King's Trust) followed by six weeks of paid work placement. Participants also

received guaranteed NHS apprenticeship interviews.

Additional support such as travel passes, clothing allowances, and refreshments funded by Sefton@Work helped reduce financial barriers for care leavers.

Impact (April 2024 – March 2025):

- 169 young people were supported across programmes.
- 97 pre-16 looked-after children received 271 targeted interventions through NREIS.
- 42 young people registered with Sefton@Work; 10 gained paid placements and 5 secured permanent roles.
- 22 young people (plus family members) took part in Multiply.
- 8 joined the Pre-Employment Programme; 4 completed, 3 progressed into full-time NHS apprenticeships.
- 1 young person joined Career Connect as an Apprentice, progressing to a Level 3 Business Admin role.

The Charter has helped address barriers such as limited networks, financial hardship, and mental health challenges. Co-location of staff, trauma-informed practice, and neurodiversity training ensured a young person-centred approach, while strong employer engagement and real work placements was key.

These efforts contributed to Sefton achieving the lowest combined NEET and Not Known figures among statistical neighbours and within the Liverpool City Region. Nationally, Sefton ranked joint 4th out of 153 local authorities for NEET outcomes in October 2024.





Empowering young people to thrive



Manchester

The Manchester team had almost 13,000 significant contacts with 3,343 young people and achieved their best-ever Not Known figures of 0.7% in April 2024.

Despite a rise in the numbers of young people who are NEET, and a further reduction in accessible in-year training provision, the team's combined NEET/Not Known figure has been sustained at 2023/24 levels.

Building on the success of the 2023 pilot, our team partnered again with Manchester City Council to deliver Wythenshawe Pathways. Seven young people joined the six-month programme, working four days a week with the Council's Neighbourhood Team, paid at the real living wage and attending training, Maths and English study one day a week.

A four-week pre-placement course, with a bursary of £80/week, helped build confidence and workplace readiness, while coaches ensured participants had travel passes, ID, and bank accounts. Each young person was supported by a dedicated coach throughout.

In 2024, three progressed to apprenticeships, one to full-time education, one to a family business, one to full-time work after early exit, and one remains supported by Career Connect. Due to the success, the project is being adapted and expanded for 2025.

The Manchester team also chaired 17 NEET Prevention Panels in the 2024/25 academic year, attended by 32 schools and training providers, discussing 217 young people and agreeing 135 referrals to Career Connect for early intervention.

The monthly VEETO (Virtual Education, Employment and Training Opportunities)

network meeting series, hosted by the team, now has 80+ frontline professionals in attendance and 500 in a bulletin distribution group – inspiring other areas to launch similar forums.

Salford

Salford Employment Hub

In 2024/25, the Salford team delivered 5,497 substantial interventions, supporting 1,662 young people.

92% of those were contacted within 10 working days of becoming NEET (significantly above the Northwest average of 42%).

The team continued to work on behalf of Salford Council as part of the Salford Employment Hub. This included providing support for young people at risk of becoming NEET who are electively home educated, those with an EHCP educated out of the city, those attending a Pupil Referral Unit, and care experienced young people via the Virtual School.

The team supported the delivery of four summer programmes for young people leaving Year 11 who were most at risk of becoming NEET. 35 young people attended the programmes, with 29 moving into and sustaining a place in employment, education or training. Our ongoing evaluation shows that attendance at a summer programme increases the chance of young people progressing onto and sustaining a positive destination.

Image: Construction Summer Programme

The team also delivered two successful Discover Your Future programmes with the Lowry (see case study on page 23).

Specialist support

The team has a linked Careers Adviser to Salford City College, supporting the retention and progression of students.

The support provided to young people with SEND has also been strengthened through the establishment of a lead Careers Adviser for SEND. Their caseload focuses on young people who are NEET and those in Year 11 attending schools outside of Salford. They have established strong partnership working with the Council's SEND team and supported the development of post-16 alternative provision with Edintervention.



Case Study

“What I’ve learned is you have to build up your confidence”

With support from Manchester Career Coach Wiktoria, Michael* (age 17) focused on tackling social anxiety and building confidence. He now has ambitions to see the world.

When Michael met Wiktoria, he told her he wasn’t very confident and found new situations overwhelming, preferring to go to new places with his mum.

He remembered being confident in year 7, with a lot of friends, but after experiencing bullying, he began to feel self-conscious.

This, followed by the Covid lockdown, left Michael feeling isolated, and like he had lost his social skills. When on-site education resumed, Michael had lost interest and enjoyment of school; he felt anxious, and his attendance and GCSE attainment suffered. Big crowds and the busy environment made him feel physically sick.

Wiktoria met Michael as he was preparing to leave school – and one of the first things she did was ask him about his hopes and dreams. One of those was to work in travel. Together, Michael and Wiktoria made a plan to start with the first step – confidence building.

Wiktoria referred Michael to MThrive, an emotional wellbeing and mental health support programme, which Michael completed with one of their navigators – and started to feel more confident and positive about his future.

Wiktoria helped Michael in developing travel confidence, including applying for an Ourpass. She also supported him to open a bank account, create a CV, use job search tools and attend an apprenticeship event.



With his confidence to travel independently building, and with support from Wiktoria, Michael applied to study Travel and Tourism Level 1.

The course had a waiting list, but in the meantime, Wiktoria referred Michael to Nurturing Foundations, a youth and community charity, where he was selected for a three-month paid placement in the Youth and Community Management sector. He felt comfortable taking public transport to his placement.

Michael gained experience at a heritage railway attraction – further supporting his ambition to work in travel and tourism.

Michael said: “I’ve done tasks like logging information and archive cataloguing. I’ve learned about organisation, talking to customers, deliveries, and cashing up. Everyone was really nice. My placement helped me feel what it’s like to have an actual job. I’m more confident in talking to people now, and in adapting.”

“What I’ve learned is you have to build up your confidence to move forward, when you’re a young person and struggling with anxiety and social situations – that’s what I did with Wiktoria.

“She never gave up on me. She’s very nice, and she’s the reason why I’m where I am now. In the longer term, I’d like to work in a role like cabin crew or other role in tourism.

“I’d say I’ve learned that I have potential. I’ve spent time unlocking what I have inside of me. I’ve been finding the pieces and putting them together.”

**Not participant’s real name*

Case Study

Discover Your Future

Discover Your Future (DYF) is a collaboration between Career Connect and the Lowry Theatre Salford. The Lowry shared our Salford team's aims and objectives to reach young people who were not accessing education or training and needed support.

DYF takes place over two weeks at each half term and aims to engage young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET).

This year, Career Connect engaged young people to participate who found it difficult to be in social settings or find it hard to travel independently due to anxiety, or were socially isolated. Some young people wanted to make friends, gain work experience and build on their confidence; foundations that support moving into employment, training or further education.

The overall aim was to offer a fun and sociable experience which enabled young people to meet each other, make friendships, and gain peer support.

Young people had the opportunity to talk to staff, discover what the Lowry does, and the various careers available in the arts sector, including venue management, marketing, sound and lighting, stage management, health and safety, box office, corporate hospitality and more.

Alongside this, the young people enjoyed a range of fun employability activities — such as 'making a mocktail' class — while the Big Life Group supported with the provision of wellbeing activities ('fight or flight').



Fraser Thomas, Youth Employability and Skills Manager for The Lowry, delivered confidence-building exercises on personality types, posture and assertiveness.

On the last day, the Career Connect team and the Lowry held a careers event where local providers gave ten-minute talks on different opportunities that were available.

Several attendees were referred to the summer programmes and other local provision, and one young person was offered a placement, and then a job in hospitality, at the Lowry.

Young people's feedback:

"It was great seeing the various job roles, especially the art galleries and stage work."

"I really liked the drawing and interaction, and when people talked to us about colleges and apprenticeships. I'm so glad I came. It was calmer and more easy-going than I expected. Everyone was really welcoming."



Training and Development: equipping people to support others



Our Training and Development team continued to equip people who support others, through a range of high quality, nationally accredited qualifications. In 2024/25, their offer included:

Courses for current and aspiring careers professionals

Careers-related qualifications including the OCR Level 4 Diploma in Careers Information and Advice, and the OCR Level 6 Diploma in Career Guidance and Development – the ‘go to’ qualifications for careers advisers.

The team also marked its eighth year as a provider of the Careers Leaders programme (funded by the Careers and Enterprise Company).

Around 10% of Careers Leaders candidates return to complete the full Level 6 careers qualification with us.

Courses in information, advice, and guidance

The team delivered Advice and Guidance qualifications from Levels 2 to 4, as well as Coaching up to Level 3.

These courses are for people in public facing roles, where they are required to provide general information, advice or guidance. This could be in any context – such as charity, public or third sector, corporate, housing, education, community, or customer service.

In 2024/25 Career Connect was an assessment centre, accredited to deliver courses through four awarding bodies: OCR, City & Guilds, ILM and NCFE.

In 2024/25 our training team delivered:

- City & Guilds Level 3 Certificate in Advice and Guidance, and Level 4 Diploma in Advice and Guidance to 47 people
- Level 4 Diploma in Careers Information and Advice to 41 people
- Level 6 Diploma in Careers Guidance and Development to 157 people
- Careers Leaders training to 154 people

Designing a new training offer

This year, the team began designing a new suite of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) courses and prepared to deliver new accredited training. Courses have been chosen to complement our current information, advice and guidance and careers training. They are designed to help us expand our reach, attract new audiences, and empower more people to help others thrive at work and in life.

Case Study

Building careers qualifications

Elaine Payne is Careers Lead and Transitions Coordinator and Upper School Class Teacher at a school for children with special education needs in Sussex.

Elaine studied for the Level 6 CEC (Careers and Enterprise Company) Careers Leaders course with Career Connect, then went on to take the extra modules required to achieve the full Level 6 OCR Diploma in Career Guidance and Development.

Elaine said: "I had taken on my careers' role alongside teaching in Sixth Form, with my role developing based on need. I began to network and was introduced to the CEC SEND group who supported me in my role, while the CEC informed me that Careers Leader training was available. This sounded ideal.

"Taking the Level 6 Careers Leaders course gave me everything I needed to start to make an impact in my extended role. It introduced me to the whole world of careers – from careers legislation to Gatsby Benchmarks and the Baker Clause. It allowed me to see where the gaps were in what I had already put in place – but it was also good for me to see what I had been doing well.

"Completing the Level 6 Careers Leaders programme helped me to put in place a structured, careers curriculum that aligned with the CDI framework. It also helped me formalise what I had been doing.

"Raising the profile of careers was important to me. The Careers Leaders qualification gave me

the confidence to go to SLT and say, 'we need a whole school approach to this.'

"I've been able to drive a focus on employer engagements, and we've since held a careers fair and hosted employer encounter events.

"Then, going on to complete the Level 6 OCR Diploma in Career Guidance and Development, I found the observations particularly useful.

"It was the first time my careers practice had been measured, so to speak, and the constructive feedback really helped me to increase my confidence."

"It was also nice to hear what I was doing well.

"Lynn was a great assessor. She gave the right amount of support and always answered any queries quickly and clearly. She had a very human approach. Her support played a role in my deciding to continue straight on to the full Level 6 Diploma. It's been great to have her with me on this journey.

"I've now got additional qualifications that have helped me develop my practice, that impact positively on students, and that formally recognise what I had been doing before."

Image: Training and Development Co-ordinator Lynn supported Elaine through both qualifications.



Case Study



Greater Lincolnshire Careers Hub

Our Training and Development team supported Greater Lincolnshire Careers Hub by delivering The Careers and Enterprise Company's (CEC) Careers Leaders Training to 18 participants from two Multi-Academy Trusts – in one cohort.

Our trainers delivered the three-day course face-to-face in Lincoln, on site at one of the schools taking part.

Lee Douglas, Greater Lincolnshire Careers Hub Lead said:

"Our role is to ensure schools in our locality are fully equipped to deliver high quality careers provision to their students. We wanted to help facilitate the CEC training for different trusts, at one time, and in one location.

"In our initial meeting, I felt that the team really listened to our requirements and explained how they would deliver the sessions.

"We wanted the training to be face-to-face, and were happy Career Connect was able to deliver it in that format. The organisation was very good, and they were able to work quickly to meet our needs. We had great communication throughout.

"Delivering the Careers Leaders Training to a whole group of schools at once, within our local area, has served as a model for the way we want to go forward. It helped us to achieve more impact, by supporting more careers leaders to complete the qualification and begin implementing their learning sooner."

Danielle Small is a Careers and Further Education Lead at Athena School and was part of the Lincolnshire Careers Hub cohort. Athena School delivers specialist provision for students with Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs.

Danielle said: "I was new to the Careers Leader role. I really enjoyed the face-to-face aspect; it allowed me to meet different kinds of people, find out where they were in their careers training, and bounce ideas off each other.

"Learning about best practice in work experience in the course content and from other learners was also very useful, as this is something I would like to explore. I also built good links with people that continued after the course finished. We often email each other to ask questions, share ideas and best practice."

"Being adaptable to different learning styles is important in my role, and this was something that the course covered well; I'll be implementing this into our careers programme."

Since completing the CEC Careers Leader training, Danielle has opted to progress onto the full Level 6 OCR Diploma in Career Guidance and Development.

Danielle said: "My assessor Andrea is amazing – if I email her, she is always quick to be back in touch and will jump on a Teams call at any time to help. She has a great style and will ask you questions that will lead you to the right answers. She's there to support you but also help you progress."

Research and Impact



Careers sector consultation

Our research has continued to shape the national conversation on careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG). Our first ever national consultation, *Careers Advice is Vital for our Future: Assessing the Evidence*, drew on submissions from across the sector and identified key evidence gaps. This included the lack of a structured CEIAG framework for 16–24-year-olds who are NEET, and limited data on long-term outcomes for vulnerable groups.

Four key research priorities emerged: stronger long-term impact models; better data on delivery of Gatsby Benchmark 8 and adviser qualifications; development of new, evidence-based delivery models; and wider use of standardised short-term outcome measures, particularly for vulnerable young people.

We took our findings to a roundtable discussion in the House of Lords, attended by parliamentarians and representatives from the major national sectoral bodies for careers. The event identified further areas of focus including: understanding school spending on CEIAG, young people's awareness of Gatsby benchmarks, and the effectiveness of virtual versus in-person guidance.

Proposal for Gatsby-style benchmarks for 16–17-year-olds

Building on this, we proposed new qualitative benchmarks for careers support for 16–17-year-olds who are NEET, similar to the Gatsby Benchmarks used in schools. These include early client-centred support, improved tracking, and consistent support into education, training or work. Our proposal gained media coverage and was well received when we presented it at the 2025 CDI Conference and the ERSA Youth Employment Forum.

Response to Youth Guarantee

We urged the government not to overlook 16–17-year-olds in the Youth Guarantee, particularly those with complex needs such as ADHD and mental health challenges.

Local Authority workshop

In October 2024, we hosted a best practice workshop, inviting representatives from the eight local authorities for whom we deliver NEET and tracking services. With a focus on what works, we gave presentations on the Wythenshawe Pathways holistic work placement model, and the early intervention model in Sefton.

A care experienced young person, who progressed to an apprenticeship in our Sefton team, and two of our Youth Ambassadors powerfully shared their lived experiences and views on effective support.

Practitioner Research Programme

Projects led by our frontline advisers have helped make a difference.

Adam Fairchild's (Case Manager, Justice Services) study on prison noise and PTSD in veterans has been submitted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal.

Jenny Booth's (Careers Adviser) research project revealed 88 out of 100 young people using one of our young people's careers services were either diagnosed or were highly likely to have ADHD. This has led to internal training and service improvements to meet the needs of young people with ADHD traits and its co-existing conditions.

Image: Representatives from the major national sectoral bodies for careers joined us at the House of Lords.



Our Social Value

In 2024/25 we were proud to have generated an additional social value of £8.8 million.

We did this through:

- Promoting local skills and employment through the creation of apprenticeships, training opportunities and providing a Real Living Wage to our staff.
- Supporting responsible regional business growth through our support for mental health and wellbeing initiatives, equality and diversity, both for Career Connect and our local supply chains
- Cultivating healthier, safer, and more resilient communities; and through our Beneficiary Fund
- Decarbonising and safeguarding our environment through a range of initiatives to reduce our environmental impact.

How we measure social value

We use the TOMs (Themes, Outcomes, and Measures) calculator, a standardised tool developed by Social Enterprise UK and the National Council for Voluntary Organizations (NCVO).

By identifying relevant themes, outcomes, and measures specific to various sectors and areas of our work, the calculator provides a

methodology for quantifying the monetary value of our social value outcomes.

Committed to our planet

We remain on track to achieve our near-term carbon reduction targets and net zero by 2040, with an 18.8% reduction in total carbon footprint emission (tonnes CO₂e) in 2023/24* compared to the previous year. These figures cover scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions.

Meanwhile, our carbon intensity (tonnes of CO₂e per full term equivalent staff member) has seen a 22.6 reduction.

We were proud to have been awarded a silver accreditation from Positive Planet, and a bronze accreditation from the Carbon Literacy Organisation for our work.

**Positive Planet measurements use figures from the previous year*



Our positive impact in 2024/25:

- Our people drove 0.5% fewer miles
- The number of individuals claiming mileage reduced by 5.4% year-on-year
- Electricity usage reduced by 18% year-on-year
- Gas KWH usage reduced by 4%
- Water use (m3) reduced by approximately 43%
- We continue to use 100% green energy where we have a responsibility for Gas and Electricity.
- Confidential waste has reduced by 8% year on year
- Our preferred supplier core stationery products are 85% green

We've made training modules on environmental sustainability available to our people and incorporated a session on the topic into our induction process. All new suppliers are asked to complete a survey detailing their environmental sustainability, and our people now complete regular working from home surveys.

Our Green Team continues to meet three times per year, sharing ideas and driving sustainability across our charity and communities.

Proud of our people

In 2024/25 we:

- Had a headcount of 325, and an increase in the number of Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority staff, to 17% (up 1%)
- Were recognised by the National Centre for Diversity as one of the Top 100 Most Inclusive Employers 2024 – number 17 on their annual list
- Achieved silver accreditation as an Investor in Diversity
- Were validated as a Disability Confident Leader, the highest level awarded by DWP. Whilst nearly 500 employers based in the Liverpool City Region have signed up to the scheme, just 15 hold Disability Confident Leader status.

- Became one of the first employers to achieve accredited status in the Liverpool City Region Fair Employment Charter.



- Achieved an exceptionally high rating on Glassdoor, with 4.8 stars based on over 140 reviews – putting us in the top 1% of all UK employers
- Supported 119 of our people to complete accredited qualifications, delivered by our Training Team. Including City and Guilds Levels 3 and 4 in Advice and Guidance; Level 4 in Advice and Guidance or Careers Information and Advice; Level 6 in Careers Guidance and Development; and Assessing (Open Awards).

In our first time entering Best Companies, Career Connect made it into not one but three lists, being ranked:

- 17 in the Top 100 Best Charities to Work for
- 66 in the Top 100 Best Northwest Companies to Work for
- 84 in the Top 100 Best Large Companies to Work for in the UK



The Best Companies to Work for Lists and Best Companies Accreditation are recognised as the standard in workplace engagement across organisations of all sizes. Best Companies surveyed all Career Connect people on a range of topics including leadership, happiness at work, work-life balance, benefits and organisational structure.

Looking

Forward

2025–2028



We are immensely proud of the life-changing impact we have achieved over the last five years.

We're also excited to move into 2025 with a new three-year strategy, built on four pillars: Growth, People, Impact and Diversification.

We have opted for three years (2025–28) as opposed to five – giving us the flexibility and agility to be responsive, in an ever changing operating environment, whilst remaining mindful of the longer term.

Over the next three years we want to:

- Increase the number of people we support and expand our reach both in geography and service delivery.
- Be recognised as a leading organisation for the impact we make, underpinned by evidenced research.
- Enable our charity to grow by diversifying our income to ensure long term financial stability. This includes growing our commercial services, establishing a centre of excellence for training and Continuing Professional Development (CPD).
- Sustain our growth by investing in, attracting, and developing talented people.

A key underpinning activity is raising awareness of our impact as providers of truly life-changing services. This includes our new branding – carried by this report – designed to reflect our new values and how our charity has evolved.

This stands alongside a new, more user-friendly and commercially capable website, and a commitment to telling the story of how we make a difference.

We're also committed to innovation, and we're further developing our commercial and fundraising streams. Digital transformation will continue to play a vital role. This includes our new CRM, designed to make our back office processes easier and allow us to reach even more people.

We know we can't make an impact without listening to those we support to shape our services, and we will continue to invest in our participant voice work and research.

It is an exciting time to be part of Career Connect. I look forward to what we can achieve, together, from 2025–2028.

Sheila

CEO, Career Connect

Our **new** values

Our vision and mission remains the same. However, we have brought together our people, trustees, stakeholders, and youth voice ambassadors to develop our updated values. These reflect the evolution of our charity, and will guide our future direction.

Innovative



Constantly learning and evolving.

We design our services to bring the most benefit for our participants. Testing new things and using data and feedback allows us to make informed decisions.

We embrace new technology and use it responsibly to equip the people we support.

Equitable



Diversity is a strength.

We recognise that people start from different places.

We take action to promote inclusion and address inequality.

We offer challenge and solutions to help achieve equitable outcomes for all.

Collaborative



We achieve more, together.

We build strong connections every day with our participants and partners, working collaboratively to improve services and opportunities.

We engage with decision makers and use research to influence and make the case for positive change.

A Voice



We're a voice for those we serve, every day.

We amplify our participants' voices in individual, local and national settings.

We listen to our participants. Their feedback shapes our work.



Find out more:

careerconnect.org.uk

 [connectmycareer](https://www.facebook.com/connectmycareer) |  [@careerconnectciag](https://www.linkedin.com/company/careerconnectciag) |  [careerconnect_iag](https://www.instagram.com/careerconnect_iag) |  [careerconnectuk](https://www.youtube.com/careerconnectuk)

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