

Impact Report | 2023/24

Welcome to our Impact Report for 2023/24



Sheila Clark,
CEO, Career Connect

This year, in driving forward our vision, **a society where every individual realises their potential**, we have achieved major success, allowing us to extend our impact and support to more people than ever.

We have worked with 10,068 adults through our justice services contracts (including in 18 UK prisons), with 45,795 young people across 214 schools, and delivered careers training and continuous professional development to 227 people from a diverse range of organisations. We've provided tracking and support services to a further 41,629 young people across the region.

That means we have delivered our high-quality professional support services to 97,719 people, an increase of just under 20% year on year!

I am proud of the increase in our reach and our development beyond our heartland of the Northwest, with our criminal justice Information Advice and Guidance services now in prisons in the North Midlands and the expansion of our school delivery, working with Multi Academy Trusts in Warwickshire and Oxfordshire.

Across our areas we have seen the development of a wide range of innovative programmes such as **Discover Your Future (Salford)**, and **Wythenshawe Pathways (Manchester)** to meet the needs of our young people.

We are sharing best practice, such as our work in Sefton, at a national level. In Liverpool we delivered the hugely successful Careers Fest event, a city-wide jobs, training, and apprenticeship fair in collaboration with Liverpool City Council and The Learning Foundry. **Meanwhile, the Wirral team initiated a groundbreaking practitioner-led research pilot in January 2024 to explore the prevalence of ADHD within the NEET cohort.**

The Achieve CFO3 programme, part-funded by the European Social Fund (ESF), was designed to assist offenders considered hard-to-reach and those experiencing multiple barriers that could increase their

likelihood of reoffending. Running since 2015, the programme concluded in July 2024, successfully supporting participants, referred by HMPPS staff or self-referred, to identify life goals, overcome barriers, and make positive choices leading to sustainable employment.

Achieve enrolled more than 19,000 individuals onto the CFO3 project, providing interventions to address barriers such as debt, substance misuse, and family relationships. The programme's success is also reflected in its ability to innovate, supported by stable funding from ESF and HMPPS CFO, allowing for a range of supportive measures, including mentoring, specialised referrals, and accredited courses, all aimed at reducing reoffending and promoting social inclusion.

In 2023/24, we further developed our Youth Voice strategy. **We are continuing to expand from Youth Voice to Participant Voice**, to include our adult programmes. We aim to bring the experiences and perspectives of as many participants as possible into the heart of what we do.

All these achievements have only been possible through the exceptional efforts of our expert teams. To continue to support our growth plans we have developed a key apprenticeship entry pathway alongside our existing Careers Adviser training academy, creating a rich talent pipeline for the future.

The last year has been an important one for the Charity **being ranked as no 10 in the top 100 Most Inclusive Employers by Investors in Diversity**, and rated as 'Very Good' by Best Companies. We won the Social Value category at the Employment Related Services Association Awards, and our Early Intervention model was shortlisted at the Children and Young People Now awards.

It has been a busy, inspiring, and impactful year and I am so pleased that we continue to change lives for the better every day.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our people, our partners and our Trustees - every one of whom has made this possible.

Our vision, mission and values

Career Connect seeks 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:

- Professional careers guidance and employer encounters in schools.
- Support for young people who are at risk or are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), reaching those who are vulnerable or from under-served groups.
- Employment, Education and Training support to offenders and ex-offenders.
- A range of fully accessible, accredited training programmes for careers professionals run face-to-face and 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 **2023/24** we have...

Provided careers education, information, advice and guidance to

45,795

young people

across **214** schools.



Supported

10,068

adults

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

Been responsible for tracking and support services for

41,629

young people



across 8 local authorities, with substantive support provided to 26,229 young people.

Provided careers training and CPD for

227 people

across local authorities, schools and professional careers agencies.



Generated an additional social value of

£8m



That's a total of



97,719

people

benefiting from the professional support services that Career Connect provides.

Youth Voice



At Career Connect, youth participation is key to the design of our young people's services.

We know that involving young people means our services are more likely to be aligned with their needs and interests, making programmes more engaging and successful.

It also helps us ensure that we are responsive to the barriers that some young people face.

We aim to create a sense of ownership and empowerment, enhancing young people's self-esteem and encouraging civic engagement.

Our Youth Ambassadors

In 2023/24, we were joined by six new Youth Ambassadors.

They do a fantastic job of keeping us focused on the issues and support needs that are important to young people. They help us develop our processes, programmes and campaigns, to suit the young people that we serve.

This year they have:

- Participated in discussions about the future of Career Connect; providing input into the development of our new strategy for 2025-30, speaking to our Chief Executive Officer and Chief Operational Officer.
- Helped to further develop our new youth brand, to ensure it is engaging and clear.
- Helped us create a participant-focused specification for our charity's new website, emphasising accessibility and engagement.
- Recommended effective ways to communicate and engage with young people.

“ It helps me gain more experience and talk to people who are of a different or similar background to me. Our youth ambassadors are all from different walks of life.

Tate

Youth Voice Champions

This is a new staff network across our charity. Staff members discuss the insights gained from young people during the delivery of services and through client surveys, and share information between teams on best practices in youth engagement.



Participation People were invited to run a session for Youth Voice Champions.

They develop participation projects involving young people in aspects of service co-design. They have also undertaken training with Youth Voice specialists Participation People.

Growing Participant Voice

In 2024/25, we will continue to develop our Participant Voice, ensuring those who access our services help us to shape them.

We began work on this in 2023/24 through research conducted with participants of the Greater Manchester Employment, Training and Education (GM ETE) programme, for people on probation.

We will be building up the skills of our teams to design and lead participation activities. We will also seek qualification accreditation for our Youth Ambassadors and broaden the skills building component of our Ambassador experience.

“ I wanted to become a Career Connect ambassador to **get a feel for what other people have to say**, and hear them share their opinions.

Josh

Lundy Model of Participation

- ▶ Underpins all of our Youth Voice work.
- ▶ Provides a framework that supports meaningful youth participation by emphasising four key elements: **space, voice, audience, and influence**.
- ▶ Ensures that young people have the space to express their views, are given opportunities to articulate those views, that their opinions are actively listened to, and that they have a genuine impact on decision-making processes.
- ▶ Helps create an environment where young people are not only heard but are integral to shaping the services that affect them.

This ensures that young people's participation is both meaningful and impactful.

Supporting Young People



At age 16, effective careers support is crucial in preventing young people from becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training).

By providing personalised guidance and resources, careers support empowers young people to explore options, understand pathways and industry requirements, and make informed decisions aligned with their interests and skills. This reduces the risk of disengagement and helps the young person to stay on track.

In 2023/24, we delivered services on behalf of eight local authorities: Liverpool, Wirral, Halton, Knowsley, St Helens, Sefton, Manchester and Salford.

Key Achievements across our Young People's teams – Liverpool City Region

Wirral Team: ADHD Pilot Project

The Wirral team initiated a ground-breaking practitioner-led research pilot in January 2024 to explore the prevalence of ADHD within a cohort of young people who are NEET. Careers

Adviser Jenny Booth leads the project with assistance from four advisers, who utilised the ADHD screening tools with the young people. The screening aims to help young people gain deeper insights into their needs and challenges which may be impacting on their progress.



Jenny Booth, Careers Adviser, Wirral team.

The project has increased staff knowledge regarding ADHD and related conditions. We will use this research to develop skills across the charity in providing effective support to young people with ADHD traits and barriers to employment.

Halton Team: Tiling Training Initiative

The Halton team supported the implementation of a tiling training programme for four young people, aimed at equipping them with the skills

needed to become self-employed tilers. The “Be the Change” initiative provided each participant with a £500 starter kit, enabling them to continue working independently.



The outcomes were highly successful: one participant secured an apprenticeship with Jackaboard, another found employment with a tiling company in Wigan, the third was referred to Ways to Work for a CSCS card to link with a construction company, and the fourth established his own tiling business in Liverpool.

This programme was a collaborative effort involving Halton Local Authority Team and Career Connect staff, who identified suitable candidates for the course and supported them to apply and throughout the course.

Knowsley Intervention Project (KIP)

The Knowsley Intervention Project (KIP) is an employability initiative funded by Knowsley Council, designed to support NEET young people by addressing the barriers preventing them from accessing education, employment, or training.

The project includes a beneficiary fund that enables Career Connect to create bespoke support packages for participants, including financial support for travel, lunch, short courses (e.g., CSCS, Beauty, Food Hygiene, First Aid), and work experience..

The programme targeted young people aged 16-18 facing barriers to employment or training. Between April 2023 and March 2024, the programme received 90 referrals, with more than one-third enrolled on a course or securing employment. This was a significant achievement given the cohort’s complex vulnerabilities and the disruption to their education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

St Helens

The team provides frequent and persistent support for NEET clients, going the extra mile to engage young people. Monthly contact for all NEET young people is 80% compared to a Northwest average of 42%, demonstrating excellent engagement. Over the year, the St Helens team delivered 8249 interventions with 2137 young people.

Liverpool Careers Fest

In July 2023, Career Connect, in collaboration with Liverpool City Council and The Learning Foundry, organised this city-wide job, training, and apprenticeship fair.

Careers Fest targeted a diverse group of young people from Liverpool who were not in education employment or training or at risk of disengaging, including Year 11 school leavers, young people aged 16-18 (up to 25 with an Education Health Care Plan), and Year 13 school leavers.

More than 30 exhibitors participated, including well-known organisations such as Liverpool in Work, The Princes Trust, City of Liverpool College, and Talent Match, providing young people with opportunities and resources.



More than 100 young people attended from Liverpool and surrounding areas.

144 referrals were made to a range of providers and many young people took steps toward further education and employment, including offers from City of Liverpool College and programmes at The Learning Foundry.

The event was also attended by key local figures, including the Cabinet Member for Employment and Skills, Lila Bennett, and Toxteth Ward Councillor, Rahima Farah, who both praised the event’s positive impact.

CASE STUDY

Early support for young people

Sefton NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) Reduction and Early Intervention Service.



The Sefton team

The Challenge:

Career Connect has delivered the service, commissioned by Sefton Council via their Employment and Learning team, since 2019. The Council moved from a solely post-16 model of careers support for NEET young people, to proactive earlier intervention.

The aim is to target young people from Year 9 onwards who are identified as being 'at risk of NEET' due to a range of factors, with the aim of keeping them on a pathway to employment, education or training at age 16.

How we made an impact:

Our report on the first four years of the service, published in February 2024, found significantly improved outcomes for young people across Sefton making the transition from Year 11, despite the disruptions caused by Covid and the cost-of-living crisis.

Of those pre-16 young people identified as being 'At Risk of NEET, the report found:

- Reductions of up to 16.8% of at-risk young people that are NEET upon leaving school.
- A reduction of between 53-78 days in the average number of days those young people spent NEET in the first 6 months of leaving school.
- The early intervention model has also led to a substantial positive impact on the number of young people whose status is 'Not Known'. In March 2024, only 0.2% of young people aged 16-17 in Sefton had a 'Not Known' status. This compares with an average of 1.2% across the Northwest and 1.7% across England. Sefton ranked 3rd place for its tracking of 16-17-year-olds' EET destinations out of 153 Local Authorities in England.

Factors leading to impact:

- Early identification of young people in need of support

- A focus on building a trusting relationship between the young person and adviser, helping the young person stay on a path to post-16 provision.
- Needs-led bespoke provision, designed around the young person – plus specialists within the team to deliver intensive support, with expertise in Special Educational Needs, Youth Justice, Care Experience and Social Care.
- A whole family approach: recognising that parents/carers have more influence than anyone else on a young person's career journey.
- Working collaboratively in a multiagency way to make every intervention count. A 'no wrong door' approach. Co-location wherever possible.
- Highly-localised – helping the young person understand exactly what is available locally and how to access it. Helping the young person feel that from there, they can go anywhere.
- Using the Lundy Model to continually shape the service to meet young people's needs.

Young people's voices:

"I had never thought about it 'til I worked with Career Connect as I was just thinking of school and scared of what happens in the future. I wasn't sure, but I trusted my worker and could be honest and ask questions."

"My mum tried to help me, but she wasn't well, I didn't have friends – I don't know what I would have done without Career Connect. School tried but I don't think they liked me as I was a pain for them not attending and sometimes with my behaviour. I needed someone to listen to me."

"We spoke about different options, college, smaller training providers, we looked online, it was about trying different things. The main thing for me was to make friends and attend as well as my Maths and English – I didn't do well in school."

Key Achievements across our Young People's teams – Manchester and Salford

Manchester City Council contract

NEET Prevention Panels, in partnership with Manchester City Council, successfully triaged more than 200 Year 11 students at risk of becoming NEET, providing advice to schools and facilitating referrals to Career Connect for more intensive support.

The VEETO (Virtual Education, Employment, and Training Opportunities) Network was also re-established and expanded, engaging over 80 professionals in monthly meetings and distributing opportunities to a network of more than 400.

Salford Contract

Career Connect began a new contract with Salford City Council in January 2024, becoming part of the Salford Employment Hub, an all-age service.

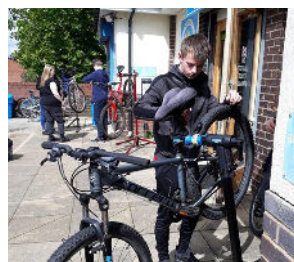
A new role, the Work Ready Coach, was introduced to meet the rising demand for employment among young people. The coach, in partnership with The Growth Company, supported job searches and interview preparation, with more than 20 young people currently on their caseload.

In February 2024, Career Connect partnered with the Lowry Theatre and the Big Life Group to deliver the Discover Your Future programme for 16-18-year-olds not in education, employment, or training. The two-week programme is designed for young people who have expressed a preference to be in a small group, find it hard to travel independently, or may be socially isolated. The goals for some young people were to make friends, gain work experience, and build confidence.



Discover Your Future programme.

The programme provided career-related skills, exposure to different career paths, and engagement activities. Sessions included customer service and hospitality, and wellbeing and photography. Outcomes included participants moving on to re-engagement activities, employment, college placements, and mentorships.



The team also delivered another successful Summer Programme, including construction, She's Punching and Riding to Success, as well as soft engagement sessions such as Pamper and Polish.

Business Administration Apprenticeship

Both our Salford and Manchester teams successfully recruited and supported Business Administration apprentices for qualifications through Salford City College.

After completing the qualification in December 2023, our Salford apprentice moved to a new role outside the charity, highlighting the programme's effectiveness in providing career development. Our Manchester apprentice remains with the charity and has moved to a role within our criminal justice team.

UKSPF and CTYF Programme

In 2023/24, Career Connect completed the ESF-funded Connect to Your Future (CTYF) programme, which supported 3,175 young people across Greater Manchester, exceeding targets in enrolments, completions, and positive outcomes.

Career Connect directly contributed with 1,044 enrolments and 615 positive outcomes. Building on this success, Career Connect was commissioned to deliver a continued support programme for at-risk NEET and NEET young people in Manchester and Salford, funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) until March 2025.

CASE STUDY

Wythenshawe Pathways



The Challenge:

Career Connect provides the NEET Prevention and Reduction Service for Manchester City Council. Wythenshawe has a high number of young people not in education, employment or training. Many young people in the area told our team that they wanted to move straight into employment. However, despite lots of local industry, they felt it wasn't accessible, with entry to apprenticeships also being seen as a barrier due to the competition involved.

How we made a difference:

Working with Manchester City Council, Career Connect developed the Wythenshawe Pathways Programme. It was designed to:

- Offer attractive, paid work placements at the Real Living Wage for six months for NEET 16-17-year-olds.
- Be hyperlocal, helping young people discover opportunities where they live and removing the barrier of travel.
- Have a less competitive recruitment process allowing young people with few qualifications or no experience a greater chance of success
- Provide longer term pathways planning for young people.
- Build relationships with a participating employer and ensure realistic expectations.

Career Connect and Manchester City Council secured the council's Neighbourhoods Team as an employer.

Career Connect held a recruitment event as part of Wythenshawe Youth Action Day, and publicised the opportunity to young people with whom they were working, also helping them with the recruitment process.

Young people who were successful with their application took part in pre-placement employability training with Career Connect to help with work readiness. During this time, they received a bursary payment, which was social value funded.

- The young people spent four days a week with their employer, and one day working with The Growth Company to improve their Maths and English qualification levels
- The young people received pastoral support from Career Connect advisers throughout, keeping them on track.
- In 2023/24 eight young people completed their six-month paid employment placement.
- There was 100% progression into further opportunities.
- One young person was taken on as an apprentice in the Neighbourhoods Team, and others progressed into apprenticeships or paid employment with local employers.
- Other young people completed their CSCS card with Career Connect and were supported into further opportunities.
- All young people taking part achieved at least one level higher in literacy and numeracy.

The initial success of the Wythenshawe Pathways programme led to its relaunch in February 2024. The programme has been expanded with two groups in North and South Manchester and supported by UKSPF funds.

Young people's voices:

"Before I spoke to the careers adviser for help trying to find a job, I just didn't even know where to start. I think with the people that I've met and the skills that they've taught me, I think I'll be able to stay in work instead of just doing nothing."

Aspirational, impactful careers support across the education sector



Work Experience visit at Career Connect's Head Office.



Challenging career stereotypes workshop.

In a year of growth for our school and college services, our commitment to aspirational, impactful careers education, advice and guidance is stronger than ever.

We work in mainstream schools, specialist schools, and alternative provision, with the same aim – to provide tailored services that meet the individual needs and aspirations of students.

We know that to make an informed decision, young people need to understand the range of career paths and industries open to them. Across the country, our advisers have continued to build new and important links with employers to make this happen.

All of our work aligns with the Gatsby Benchmarks, the framework for excellence in school-based Careers provision in England. We also offer CPD sessions, mentorship and consultation for the education sector, and are accredited to deliver the Quality in Careers Standard.

Over the past year we have:

- **Expanded our reach to 214 schools (a 16% increase from 2022/23), providing careers services to 47,164 young people across the country.** This has included supporting more than 4,000 young people via employer events

and careers fairs, and securing work experience placements for 855 young people.

- **Continued our successful partnership with Macintyre Academies, delivering the Inspirational Futures programme.** Delivered in three specialist Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) schools in Warwickshire, the programme aims to increase employer engagement and employability skills for the students across the academy trust. We provided specialist employability sessions from Key Stage 3 onwards, including opportunities to engage with employers. In 2023/24 we provided targeted employability sessions to 85 young people and created more than 700 employer links. We arranged five careers and transition fairs and five events to share information with parents.
- **Continued our Aspirations programme in Knowsley, working with nine secondary and ten primary schools** to provide an inspirational programme that supports young people to develop an understanding of university life and experience. This includes specialist careers development activities that support young people to consider university as a realistic and achievable pathway. It also involves site visits to three local university campuses. In 2023/24, 740 young people took part in the programme, with more than 80% of these reporting that participating had improved their knowledge of Higher Education.

CASE STUDY

Opening up new pathways on a specialist route



Career Connect Adviser Dr Fred Fortune at ULMaS

University of Liverpool Maths School (ULMaS) is a specialist Sixth Form college, teaching A Levels in Maths, Further Maths, Computer Science and Physics. It welcomes more than 100 students each year from across the Northwest, providing an enriched experience of studying STEM subjects.

The Challenge:

Whilst ULMaS is a specialist college, its careers strategy is to ensure that students have a full understanding of all post-18 pathways open to them.

How we made an impact:

Deputy Headteacher and Careers Lead David Hemsley said:

“Our students are very academically driven, with many focused on university and further study to PhD level and beyond, or working at a high level in fields such as Engineering or Computer Science.

“To help them succeed in their STEM careers, we want to ensure they can make fully informed decisions that consider the short, medium and long term, and transferrable skills.

“Whilst a number of our students apply to and are successful with Oxbridge applications, we want to give them a wider sense of what else is available and attainable. For example, an institution with a particular specialism, or a degree level apprenticeship that may be a good fit.

“We work with both Career Connect (through Dr Fred Fortune) and the Careers and Enterprise Company, and the combination works really well.

“Combining the industry visits we organise, with having Fred, our impartial careers expert, on site, is key to what we aim to achieve. Fred is a great fit for us, being a Physics PhD graduate herself.

This allows her to build a strong rapport with our students. They really value her guidance. She ‘gets’ them.

“We have a high percentage of students who are neurodiverse, and Fred is very attuned to the best way to support them, for example in the language she uses and framing of a situation.

“Periods of transition can be a challenge for some of our students. We combine our own pastoral support systems with Fred’s impartial careers expertise, to achieve a positive careers conversation with that young person.

“We never underestimate the impact of a good careers conversation - and Fred takes actions to maximise that impact.

“Fred sends an email to the student with a summary of the discussion, extra information and resources, and we log this on our school system, to give us a full picture. Even months later, if Fred spots something that will be useful, she will pass it on to the student.

“Fred is really good at listening to my thoughts too, and gives her own independent view.

“As well as applying her in-depth knowledge of the Gatsby benchmarks when working with students, she shares that expertise with me, and will present a positive challenge or new idea that helps me to create an impactful careers strategy.

“Fred is also very keen to ensure she is up to date with university application processes and is accompanying us on open days at Cambridge.

“I see Fred as an ally – someone who brings independent advice that benefits not just our students, but our staff and our whole careers programme. She feels just like one of our own staff, and she cares.

“We are meeting every Gatsby benchmark, of which we are very proud.”

CASE STUDY

Wirral What Next? Skills Show, November 2023



The Challenge:

Career Connect runs the What Next? Skills Show on behalf of Wirral Council. The first event took place in November 2022.



The aim for 2023 was to build on this success, and link as many young people as possible with employers and pathways, in one place, to help inform their career choices.

How we made an impact:

The second What Next? Skills Show saw more than 700 Year 10 and 11 students from 15 secondary schools across Wirral attend the Hive Wirral Youth Zone, Birkenhead. This was up by more than 250 on the number of young people who attended in 2022.



More than 55 employers, education and training providers gathered at the all-day event.

Industries represented included construction, health and life sciences, digital and creative and legal, with major local employers in attendance.

Training and education providers included Wirral Met College, local universities and specialist providers of training in sports, media production and performing and creative arts.

Students enjoyed conversations with employers and education providers and were able to take away materials with more information.

Cllr Sue Powell-Wilde, who was Chair of Children, Young People and Education Committee for Wirral Council at the time, said:

"Giving our young people the chance to dip their toes into the world of work is so important, as today's students are our future workforce."



"The What Next? Skills Show allows young people to make connections with employers and get more information while also giving them an opportunity to ask questions about their future career choices."

Training services: helping people to help others



We have continued to empower those who provide careers education, advice and guidance, and those in public facing roles, through high quality, nationally accredited qualifications.

We are an assessment centre, accredited to deliver courses through four awarding bodies: OCR, City & Guilds, ILM and Open Awards.

Our qualifications include:

- Advice and Guidance from Level 2 to Level 4
- Coaching at Level 3
- Careers-related qualifications at Levels 4 and 6

For the fifth year we are also pleased to deliver the Level 6 Career Leaders programme for those leading Careers programmes in schools, funded by the Careers and Enterprise Company.

About 10% of Career Leaders return to complete the full Level 6 careers qualification with us.

We also offer entry level to Level 2 vocational qualifications focussing on the Preparation for Life and Work sector, accredited through Open Awards.

These are aimed at supporting individuals with personal development and employability through a range of short courses including Coping with Change, Managing Anger and Preparation for Work.

In 2023/24 we delivered:

- Open Awards Level 1 & 2 Employability qualifications to 89 people
- City & Guilds Level 3 Certificate in Advice and Guidance, and Level 4 Diploma in Advice and Guidance to 30 people
- Level 6 Diploma in Careers Guidance and Development to 44 people
- Career Leaders training to 64 people

We also conducted CPD with 3 local authorities, on careers guidance and practice and further sessions around safeguarding.

CASE STUDY

Empowering careers professionals at all levels

The Challenge:

Wigan Council's Aspiring Futures team provides careers support to pupils across the borough. The team has professionals at different stages of their own careers - with differing training needs and time commitments.

How we made an impact:

The Aspiring Futures team had two new advisers who studied for the Level 6 qualification in Careers Advice and Guidance. Progression Advisers also undertook top-up units to progress from a Level 4 to a Level 6. Another staff member has also started their Level 4 Advice and Guidance qualification, and wider CPD was also on the agenda.

Lisa Felgate, Careers Service Manager at Wigan Council's Aspiring Futures Team said:

"We were very keen to have an organisation who knew what they were doing and delivered things in a friendly and approachable manner. Career Connect has always had that level of professionalism and high standards. They listen to what the organisation wants and deliver courses which reflect that. I always look forward to working with them.

"Having really good communication, especially regarding our Level 4 and 6 candidates, was really important to us, and Career Connect is very good at that. We got regular updates of where our staff were up to, and due dates for assignments so that we could support them in managing study and their day-to-day role.

"As well as formal qualifications, we commissioned Career Connect for a Theories of Guidance refresher training for the whole team. They made the time to sit with us and understand what was important for us. They put together a really comprehensive programme of training, and it was very well received.

"Upskilling and the development of knowledge is really important for us, but we are also really keen to develop reflective practice. The training - both the formal and refresher - has allowed our staff to reflect on their own practice and look at areas for development.

"We've been able to get staff to feel that it's ok to try new things out and implement what they've learned.

"We've seen better, more informed practitioners; people that are wanting to try new things, that have really good conversations with the rest of the team, and that are always looking forward. For us, it's about developing the quality of service that we provide to young people across the Wigan borough."

Lucy Gillespie is a Careers Adviser in the Aspiring Futures Team. She has recently completed the Level 6 Advice and Guidance qualification. Lucy said:

"I've been able to use the skills that I've learned on my day-to-day job by pulling from a number of theories I was taught; I use motivational theories within my interviewing, and it's really helped me to refine the techniques I use within my practice. I can apply a variety of models at different points within an interview, or with challenging clients.

"I would sum up the experience of working with Career Connect as fantastic. A really supportive, engaging experience. Career Connect provides a really strong platform for practitioners to develop and evolve their practice.

"I had lots of interaction with my mentor Andrea. She was always on hand to answer any questions and offer any support. I was able to use different resources and access the course in my own time. I completed on time and my mentor's support was crucial in this."

Supporting offenders and ex-offenders to take a new path towards employment.

Research shows that being in employment soon after release from prison or after completing a community order is key in preventing reoffending.

In 2023/24 Career Connect supported offenders and ex-offenders through our justice services team Achieve.

We worked across fourteen prisons in the Northwest and four prisons in the North Midlands, through six national, regional, and institutional contracts.

We have enjoyed considerable success and have brought impactful innovation to new and existing programmes, delivering services to 10,068 adults.

Key Achievements

CFO3

The Achieve CFO3 programme, part-funded by the European Social Fund (ESF), was designed to assist offenders considered hard-to-reach and those experiencing multiple barriers that could increase their likelihood of reoffending.



Running since 2015 and concluded in July 2024, the programme helped participants, referred by HMPPS staff or self-referred, to identify life goals, overcome barriers, and make positive choices leading to sustainable employment.

Achieve delivered the programme across various prisons, probation offices, and community venues

in the Northwest of England, including Greater Manchester, Cheshire, Merseyside, Cumbria, and Lancashire.

The programme took a personalised approach, focusing on the individual needs of participants through detailed case assessments and SMART action plans. These plans guided participants throughout their criminal justice journey, offering consistent support both in custody and in the community.

Achieve enrolled more than 19,000 individuals onto the CFO3 project, providing interventions to address barriers such as debt, substance misuse, and family relationships. The programme's success is also reflected in its ability to innovate, supported by stable funding from ESF and HMPPS CFO, allowing for a range of supportive measures, including mentoring, specialised referrals, and accredited courses, all aimed at reducing reoffending and promoting social inclusion.

The Achieve CFO3 team's work has also attracted a number of awards. At the national CFO celebration event, Achieve won:

- Veteran's award (for the HMPPS Discovery Wing project at HMP Risley)
- Creative arts award (for the Music Minds course)
- Neurodiversity award – individual award for Lisa Duckworth, Case Manager

The Achieve team was also nominated for the Women's award for the Coaching Inside and Out programme at HMP Styal.

The Discovery Wing project has also been recognised with two more accolades. The team won a Special Recognition Award at the CFO Veterans in Custody Support Officer (ViCSO) Awards, and was shortlisted for an Employment Related Services Association (ERSA) award for Partnership of the Year.

CASE STUDY

Music Minds of HMP Wymott

Funded through the CFO3 Development Fund and delivered by Creativity Works, this week-long course was offered to residents of PIPE Wing at HMP Wymott – an environment for individuals with complex needs and personality disorders.

Participants had access to a range of activities, including music production, lyric writing, performance, and research and development of musical scores to produce their own music, supported by music development and instrument workshops.

The course helped individuals to develop skills, engage with other prison provisions, and with community services on release.

As well as the opportunity to experience positive, enjoyable activities whilst learning transferable skills, there is evidence that music – particularly live music – can contribute to improved mental health and wellbeing.

Everyone completing the course received a Level 1 Award in Exploring Occupational Studies, while also gaining valuable experience of collaboration and team-working skills as they worked towards development of a live performance on the final day of the course.

The participant group, who named themselves The Keys and Bars Collective, performed original songs and music in front of a live studio audience that included senior prison leads, CFO staff and Achieve Managing Director Chris Bennett.

Feedback received from participants suggests they all enjoyed the course, engaged well and worked hard towards the live performance.

Achieve Team Manager Ant Bigley (who also took part in the performance) said:

"I am very proud of The Keys and Bars Collective for producing such a memorable show and creating such thought-provoking pieces. The positive reaction from course participants is testament to the hard work of everyone involved."

Since the initial course, HMP Wymott has run further Music Minds courses, including a Christmas production that brought together participants of the various courses to showcase and perform their work.

The initiative has also led to the recruitment of other music mentors who support newcomers, and they are now a recognised and respected support mechanism within the prison community.

The Keys and Bars Collective continues to meet weekly for sessions and their songwriting repertoire continues to grow, with potential plans to record their work during 2024.

CASE STUDY

Evaluation highlights needs of people on probation

Our evaluation of the Greater Manchester Integrated Rehabilitative Services – Employment, Training, and Education (IRS-E TE) programme has highlighted the high demand for specialised E TE services for people on probation.

The service consistently exceeded its monthly referral targets, with over 7,200 referrals against a target of 6,188 by February 2024.

Despite the complex barriers faced by participants, 97% of referrals had an initial assessment within the targeted 10 days.

The programme is valued by both probation professionals and participants for its tailored support, which is more effective than mainstream employment services in addressing the unique challenges faced by those on probation.

The evaluation also underscores the importance of co-locating dedicated E TE Key Workers within probation offices across Greater Manchester. This co-location has significantly improved communication between probation professionals and Key Workers, leading to better support and faster service delivery.

The close collaboration has resulted in 31.9% of participants achieving an employment, training, or education outcome within an average of 60 days, although outcomes are lower for those with higher complexity barriers and for women.

Challenges identified include the need for longer-term support for participants with high-complexity barriers and the relatively lower success rates for women. The report suggests that targeted support for women and extended engagement for those with complex needs could enhance outcomes. Additionally, the evaluation found that over 40% of referrals do not result in service take-up, often due to participants withdrawing before assessment,

indicating a need to explore and address the reasons behind this dropout rate.

Our evaluation concludes with recommendations to strengthen the impact of the IRS-E TE service. These include expanding the capacity of the service to meet increasing demand, ensuring co-location of Key Workers within probation offices, and providing specialised, longer-term support for participants with complex needs. It also emphasises the need to better align services with the specific challenges faced by women on probation and to consider reducing Key Worker caseloads to improve service quality and participant outcomes.

Participant voices:

“They [Key Worker] have access to your background, you’re not having to explain to them, somebody knew about the reasons why you are here and why you can’t do certain jobs it’s already been laid out.”

“There’s never a point where you sit there or get the impression of I don’t even feel like talking to you today, it’s always a sense of you know he’s always available to have any questions.”

Staff voices:

“I think going back to understanding the barriers, I think that was really important and just knowing why, what’s going on in their heads sometimes and why they can’t get onto the job market training and then getting past that.”

Achieve Key Worker

“It works really well sat in our office. I don’t think people would refer as much if that were not the case.”

Probation practitioner



CASE STUDY

Lancashire/Cumbria IAG: Careers support in custody leading to positive outcomes

The Careers Information Advice and Guidance (CIAG) programme, run by the Achieve team in five male prisons across Lancashire and Cumbria since 2019, has significantly outperformed national averages in securing post-release employment.

The programme, which focuses on preparing prisoners for work within 12 weeks of their release, has achieved employment rates almost 1.7 times higher than the national average within six weeks post-release, and throughout the year, consistently achieved the highest monthly employment on release percentage, both regionally and nationally.

The programme's success is attributed by participants and employers to its tailored approach that combines independent careers information advice and guidance, with job brokering, linking prisoners with suitable vacancies in the local labour market.

Employers engaged in the programme report positive experiences regarding the quality of candidates sourced through the programme, and the support provided by the Achieve team has been crucial in maintaining these relationships.

Participant voices:

"They really helped me by not focusing on what I had done in the past but what I could do in the future. They gave me hope but not false hope....no false promises."

"I didn't even think about doing what I am doing now and I have recently been put forward for promotion, it's not what I expected."

"They got me on the utilities course and a qualification which should mean I can go straight into a job that is quite well paid... that makes a huge difference."

"The preparation support helped me to be more confident about it. I didn't necessarily think I would get the job but I knew that I could at least try for it."

Research and Evaluation

At Career Connect, we invest in research and evaluation to assess the effectiveness of our programmes and initiatives.

By understanding what works and what doesn't, we can improve our services and maximize their impact.

Research and evaluation also generate valuable insights into emerging trends, needs, and challenges within our areas of work. This helps us to adapt to changing circumstances and continue to meet the needs of those that we serve.

Our research helps us to amplify the voices of those we support at national and local levels. With access to insights and feedback, we are able to analyse need, identify gaps and make recommendations for key decision makers to consider.

We shared our research at:

- ERSA Annual Conference & Youth Employment Forums.
- Children and Young People Now Evaluation Conference.
- University of Central Lancashire Criminal Justice Partnerships Prison Research Network Conference.

In 2023/24 we conducted research and analysis on:

- The impact of early interventions to reduce risk of NEET among young people in Sefton
- Effective employment support for people on probation in Greater Manchester
- What works in supporting adults who have been in prison into employment
- Place-based youth employment support
- Elective home education

Our research and evaluation work helps us to share best practice with others, informing the work of the careers sector as a whole.

Career Connect on a national stage

We regularly contribute evidence to inquiries conducted by the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Youth Employment, and Select Committees relating to employment support.

In March 2023, we ran our first consultation exercise to assess views on the strength of evidence about the impact of independent careers support for young people.

Giving our participants a voice



Consultation now open:

Careers Advice is Vital for our Future:
Assessing the Evidence



Social Value

In 2023/24, we created more than £8million of Social Value 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.

We use the Social Value TOMS (Themes, Outcomes, and Measures) tool framework designed to help organisations measure and maximize their social value— the positive impact they have on society beyond financial profits – to estimate our impact across the charity.

A positive impact on our planet



We work with Tameside Community Computers to recycle old tech, and help bridge the digital divide.

A key theme for us in 2023/24 was on reducing the impact that our carbon emissions make on the environment. We worked with Positive Planet to establish our baseline emissions at the start of the year. These consist of:

Scope 1 emissions: direct greenhouse gas emissions that occur from sources owned or controlled by a company, such as emissions from the combustion of fuels in on-site boilers, furnaces, or vehicles.

Scope 2 emissions: indirect greenhouse gas emissions that result from the generation of purchased electricity, steam or other forms of energy consumed by a company.

Scope 3 emissions: all other indirect greenhouse gas emissions that occur in an organisation's value chain, including emissions from upstream and downstream activities.

From this baseline, we have agreed the following targets.

Our near-term targets:

- Reduce scope 1 and 2 emissions by 60% by 2030.
- At all paid offices, procure 80% renewable electricity by 2025 and 100% by 2030.
- Reduce Scope 3 emissions by 50% by 2030.
- Measure all scope 3 categories by 2026.
- Our long-term targets:
- Reduce our total market-based emissions (scope 1, 2 and 3) by at least 90% by 2040.
- Neutralise any residual emissions using verified carbon offsets.

We will be reporting annually on our progress against these targets.

As part of our efforts to reduce emissions, we ran a full-day Carbon Literacy training for staff, leading to measurable action plans of how we will reduce the charity's emissions.

positive planet



Find out more:

careerconnect.org.uk

 [connectmycareer](https://www.facebook.com/connectmycareer) |  [@connectmycareer](https://twitter.com/connectmycareer) |  [careerconnect_iag](https://www.instagram.com/careerconnect_iag) |  [careerconnectuk](https://www.tiktok.com/careerconnectuk)