



**Young Women's
Experiences of Careers Advice
and Guidance in Wales**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Chwarae Teg's vision is a fairer Wales where women achieve and prosper. Working with women, businesses, educators and decision-makers since 1992, Chwarae Teg aim to ensure that women achieve and prosper across all sectors and at all levels in the economy, are visible and influential across all sectors of the economy, society and in public life, and are empowered to achieve their potential, regardless of their background, social status, or geographic location.

The labour market in Wales is still notably segregated on the basis of gender. Women continue to be under-represented in senior positions in many sectors and are much less likely to be working in sectors traditionally seen as "male", such as construction, engineering and manufacturing. This inequality and segregation is shaped by the choices that are made early in our lives. As our economy transforms, sectors such as green tech and digital are likely to see significant growth, but without intervention we're likely to see the same inequality recreated and reinforced in these emerging sectors. Careers advice and guidance is therefore a critical tool in challenging stereotypical ideas about career pathways and tackling gender segregation in the workplace.

This research explores how well careers services in Wales are meeting young women's needs and seeks to identify and understand the challenges as we navigate and recover from the Covid-19 pandemic. Through desk-based research, an online survey of young women and engagement with careers support providers, we've considered the availability of careers support, content and delivery models, the impact of the pandemic and the wider perception and understanding of careers services.



Pandemic

The pandemic disrupted access to education and experiences, such as work experience and employer engagement events, due to cancellation of in-person events alongside businesses and education moving to remote working for social distancing. This has reduced young women's opportunities to network, speak informally to adults and learn through hands on experience. This was a key reason for significant variance between the age groups of young women respondents to a number of questions, including: awareness and use of services; most common route for accessing career support; and experience of targeted services such as development of soft skills, completion of work experience and advice about new and emerging industries.

For example, only 39% of 14 – 18 year old respondents have completed work experience compared to 88% of 19 – 25 year old respondents. The most common route for organisation of work experience for the older age group was by their school, whereas for the younger age group the most common way was by themselves or through a parent or a relative. This is concerning from an equality perspective as reliance on parents or relatives to support work experience will negatively impact those with fewer connections and further increase the opportunity gap.

The social distancing measures of the pandemic also impacted the route of delivery for support, with the forced increase in online delivery of support, education and work. 10 of the 13 career service provider survey respondents reported that their services have changed because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Eight shared that there has been a move towards providing remote or virtual consultations with service users online, via email, or by telephone. This increase in opportunities to connect virtually has increased access to events and individuals that would otherwise be prohibitive due to being geographically distant and it will be important to foster a hybrid approach moving forward, with a mixture of in person and virtual careers services.



Availability of Careers Support and Delivery Methods

Gender stereotypes continue to be an issue in Wales and is particularly marked in the choices of young women from low socio-economic backgrounds, for example those eligible for free school meals. To help challenge gender stereotypes and occupational segregation, it is essential to increase the visibility of women in diverse roles across all sectors and at all levels of leadership. Young women stated that connecting to women in roles and industries they were interested in pursuing through work experience, networking, employer engagement and mentoring schemes, has been an instrumental part of their career development, support and education.

Although Wales has a strong network of career service providers and a national career service, thereby being well placed to provide holistic, appropriate support to the diverse needs of young women in Wales, due to funding cuts there are gaps in support for work experience and a significant reduction in one-to-one support available, which is having a direct impact on young women in Wales. While there is a high level of awareness among young women of larger career service providers, there is a significant gap between awareness and actual use of services.

A huge responsibility for informal careers support is placed on teachers and raises the question of how best to enable them to stay up to date on information about the labour market and training to challenge stereotypes, without further overloading them. There is a need for teachers to participate in careers training to ensure they understand and can share information about the diverse career routes available to their students, but it is essential that there is a careers service in place for teachers to refer and signpost young women to so they can seek advice from trained professional career advisors as needed.

Key areas for improvement identified:

- Close the gap between awareness and use of careers services
- First contact with services comes too late at 14-16 years old
- Move away from one-size fits all delivery
- Create better links between career services and parents
- Improve and increase support and training for teachers





Content of Careers Support

Almost half of the young women survey respondents, 42%, felt that career support **has given** them what they needed, whilst 26% stated that career support **did not** give them what they needed. 67% of 19-25 year olds reported engagement with potential employers, compared to just 46% of 14-18 year olds, and just 18% of respondents overall reported engagement with employers through talks at school, college or university.

Key areas for improvement identified:

- More targeted support and interventions for women
- Opportunities for young women to hear from role models and access mentoring
- Information about new and emerging industries, including 'green jobs'
- Financial advice as part of wider careers education and support
- More support around work experience and developing work-related skills



Career Services Profession


More consistency is needed in where and how resources are updated to ensure career advice and guidance is up to date on emerging industries and opportunities. Career service professionals should work together to create a resource centre for all career service providers to access aligned up-to-date information on the labour market and emerging industries to bring consistency to the advice and support available.

There is a lack of understanding about how gender shapes young women's experiences, opportunities and outcomes. There seems to be a real focus on equality of opportunity, with more limited consideration of whether women are gaining the same benefits or outcomes from career service provision. All career service providers should make equality and unconscious bias training mandatory for all involved in delivering career education and advice. This training must focus on achieving equitable outcomes not just equality of opportunity.



Perception and Understanding of Careers Services

There is a need to improve the image of career services, as the prevailing narrative, especially around school career services, is that a career advisor's advice will be generic, gender stereotyped and likely to misdirect or undervalue the receiver. However, career service providers are trained, qualified professionals held to high standards and expected to undertake ongoing continuing professional development (CPD) to keep up to date. Not only this, but they are passionate about delivering a relevant and up to date service. Educators and others need to challenge negative perceptions that might be keeping engagement levels low.

There have been improvements in the perception of career advisors noted in this research in comparison to Chwarae Teg's previous report **Bright: Young Women's Career Aspirations** , with career advisors being listed more highly as a source of support and an increase in the proportion of young women stating that career advice services have influenced their education and career decisions.

There is also a need to do more to ensure a shared understanding of what constitutes career advice and support. The language used to identify and discuss different elements of career services needs to be made consistent and clearer to enable young women to search for and utilise the appropriate support as required during their life. Clearly defined career service elements may also enable a conversation around what to expect from 'successful' career support, helping to create a more positive narrative around career services.



Recommendations

Availability of careers support and methods of delivery:

1. Welsh Government should increase investment into career education and guidance to:
 - a Increase provision and take-up of careers support and guidance in primary schools and secondary schools prior to GCSE options
 - b Support engagement with parents, enabling them to provide support to their children as they make education and career decisions
 - c Improve provision and take up of post-compulsory education careers services
2. Hybrid delivery of career services should become the norm, which includes more face-to-face delivery and tailored guidance, increased resources and dedicated space as required
3. Welsh Government should ensure effective careers support and education in schools by:
 - a Providing teachers with the skills and training needed to offer baseline career support and guidance
 - b Providing consistent access to dedicated career advisors within schools, who can provide more substantial support to individuals and ensure a comprehensive approach to career and work education and advice within the school

Content of careers advice and guidance:

4. Career service providers must ensure they include information on new and emerging industries and 'green jobs' in their delivery
5. Careers Wales should take action to widen access to and improve take up of work experience and work-related education. This will likely require additional funding from Welsh Government and should complement the roll out of the new curriculum and the Careers and Work-Related Experiences (CWRE)
6. Welsh Government and Careers Wales should work with partners to increase access to mentoring, opportunities for networking and opportunities to meet relatable and diverse role models
7. Welsh Government should invest in financial advice and education for young people, delivered either via the new curriculum or as part of Careers Wales services
8. Welsh Government should invest in more targeted interventions that provide careers advice and guidance to women and are designed with women's needs in mind

Careers services infrastructure and profession:

9. Careers Wales and representative bodies such as the Career Development Institute (CDI) should work together to create a resource centre for all career providers to access up-to-date information on the labour market, emerging jobs and sectors, and work to bring consistency to the advice and support available
10. All career providers should make equality and unconscious bias training mandatory for all involved in delivering careers education and advice. This training must focus on achieving equitable outcomes not just equality of opportunity

Perception and understanding of careers services:

11. Further research should be undertaken to understand what is causing the significant gap between awareness of careers advice services and engagement with those services
12. Careers Wales, Welsh Government and career provider industry bodies need to create and communicate a shared definition of what constitutes career advice and guidance to improve the perception and understanding of career services

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