



The Young
Foundation

No Wrong Door

How an integrated employment and
skills system can support Londoners

Summary report

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MAYOR OF LONDON

Foreword

'A roadmap for tangible action'

The successful devolution of London's Adult Education Budget (AEB) has helped Londoners increase their earnings, learn new skills, progress in their chosen field, and build confidence in the workplace. However, the prevailing cost-of-living crisis means it's even more important that Londoners get the skills they need to move into good work.

I am delighted to present No Wrong Door: how an integrated employment and skills system can support Londoners, which represents a significant milestone in our ongoing efforts to integrate London's skills and employment services and connect Londoners with the right type of support at the right time in their training and employment journey.

Delivered in partnership with London boroughs, London Councils and Jobcentre Plus, the Mayor's No Wrong Door programme aims to strengthen joint working across London to ensure that skills and employment services deliver for Londoners who are disproportionately affected by labour market inequalities. This report provides an evidence base on the barriers and challenges that Londoners face when accessing skills and employment services.

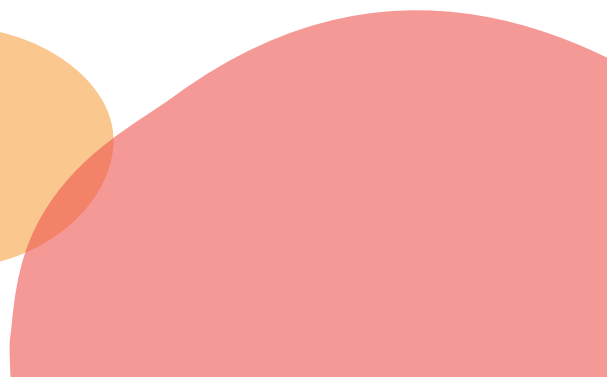
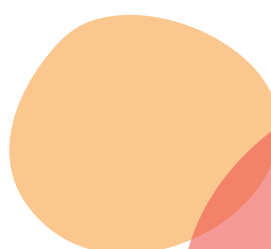
The challenges set out in the report are complex and interconnected. We have heard from both Londoners and providers who feel the existing system is not working well for them. The recommendations set out clear areas for action, where we can strengthen community connections,

provide tailored support to Londoners, and bring new partners to the table, amongst others. I encourage all our partners to engage with this report in a spirit of collaboration and help contribute to the successful implementation of its recommendations.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the team at The Young Foundation who led this research, our partners at the Department for Work and Pensions, London Councils, and those leading the No Wrong Door Integration Hubs, and to the practitioners, providers and Londoners who have contributed their time, expertise, and insights to produce this report. Their commitment to improving the experiences and outcomes for Londoners is commendable as the report findings and recommendations provide a roadmap for tangible action.

We look forward to continuing our work with our No Wrong Door partners and the Integration Hubs, to build on the programme's success and deliver a more integrated, accessible and equitable skills and employment service for London.

Jules Pipe CBE
Deputy Mayor, Planning, Regeneration & Skills



Context

As part of the Greater London Authority's (GLA) overall mission to support Londoners into good jobs, the No Wrong Door (NWD) initiative was set up to integrate development and training opportunities across London's skills and employment support landscape.

The NWD initiative includes a research strand (the focus of this report) which seeks to build an evidence base on the existing employment and skills support system, and to better understand the diversity of needs across a range of priority groups trying to access skills and employment services across London. Drawing on the research findings, this report presents recommendations that will be instrumental to supporting the integration of employment and skills services across the capital so that they meet the needs of Londoners trying to secure good work.



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Research objectives

The Young Foundation led research, focused on the following questions:

1. How do key target groups access information about support relating to skills, employment, and careers?
2. What are the key gaps and support challenges Londoners face in their user journey with the employment, skills, and career services, as well as wider support services such as those relating to health and housing?
3. What are the key user needs and what mechanisms can be used to:
 - better support people who are already engaging with the system, and
 - motivate excluded groups to engage with the system?
4. Which organisations are already delivering more coordinated service provision and how can project interventions build on existing capacity?
5. What are good practice examples of integration and coordination of provision, and how can these be scaled across London and used to provide guidance for further project interventions?

Research design

From the outset of the research programme, The Young Foundation and the GLA agreed to focus on seven key service user groups to understand their specific needs, and to identify barriers in the current employment support and skills provision offer. There are seven priority groups:

1. Young people
2. Young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
3. People aged 50 and over
4. People from BAME backgrounds
5. People with disabilities
6. People with experience of the criminal justice system
7. People earning below London Living Wage or qualified at Level 2 or below

A qualitative research approach was adopted over two phases to engage with key stakeholders and this included:

- an online service provider survey which received 101 responses
- in-depth one-to-one interviews with 20 staff working in employment and skills provision
- focus groups and one-to-one interviews with 136 people with experience of trying to access skills and employment services in London.
- four co-creation workshops with service providers and local authority staff from London's sub-regional partnerships to identify opportunities to enhance integration at a sub-regional level
- a pan-London workshop in October 2022 with attendees from the four sub-regions, to identify localised and city-wide recommendations and next steps based on research findings

In total, the survey, interviews and focus groups heard from at least 254 research participants. In addition, more than 100 professionals attended the five workshops. While engaging a wide range of Londoners, the research is qualitative in nature and, therefore the findings should not be generalised to speak for the experiences of all Londoners, but does provide a grounded view of the challenges and opportunities to inform the NWD initiative.

Summary research findings

The sections below provide a high-level summary of the themes and findings from the research. The full report sets out these findings and data in more detail, and can be read [here](#)

The definition of 'good work' varies, and can depend on your employment history

'Good work' means different things to different people and often depends on whether someone is taking their first steps into the job market or has been looking for work for a period of time. When asked to define 'what good work means to them, responses from respondents ranged from expectations of being paid fairly to more aspirational hopes for jobs tailored to an individual's skills, abilities and interests.

Those who had been looking for work over a long period of time were more likely to lower their aspirations about what constitutes 'good work', *"meaningful work is probably unrealistic, as long as it lets you get by, it's enough"* (Antony, 56).

For service providers, some defined good work as employment with a minimum six month duration, with some stipulating that this work must be paid at the London Living Wage. Other service providers were less clear on their definition of good work, identifying only that sometimes service users needed to take work as a stepping stone, even if it wasn't in their field of interest.

Londoners across the city face different challenges to securing good work

Most of the service users that took part in the research were seeking employment, rather than training or skills-building. This was due to a need for regular income, whereas training is usually unpaid and was perceived as a challenge to undertake for many. The value of practical, hands-on work experience over training was stressed as important by many respondents, particularly those who had migrated to the UK and were trying to find roles similar to those held in their countries of origin.

This research has shown that the system supporting Londoners into work faces a range of challenges, and service users across the priority groups often struggle to access employment, skills, and training that responds to their needs.

A lack of work experience and other challenges prevent **young people** getting a foot on the employment ladder. And **older people** reported finding themselves being disregarded by employers in favour of younger workers. *"[It] just seemed like they weren't interested anymore. Because of my age"*

Some service users experienced direct and/or indirect discrimination in relation to age, race, ethnicity, and disability in the workplace, but challenging this was cited as difficult, and self-advocacy was almost a job in itself. *"I'm from a Pakistani background, I wear a hijab, and I'm teaching PE... The way that people's reactions have been when I go into jobs, and they see what I look like, I think it has been [clear], the fact that I don't look like a typical PE teacher in terms of what I'm wearing in terms of my background"*.

People with a disability find it particularly challenging to find good work or enter training. When finding out about services that can support disabled people into good work, disabled respondents said they often have to self-advocate and seek out opportunities alone. Some respondents shared that the easiest solution was to hide their disability from employers, as they feel it will work against them and prevent them from getting a job. *“I’ve had numerous times in my life where I have disclosed and then I’ve been let go, you know, so I generally don’t tell employers”.*

Young people with SEND face additional barriers as they leave supportive school and college environments and find it difficult to access work in the traditional manner, often without knowledge of their rights and the support they are entitled to.

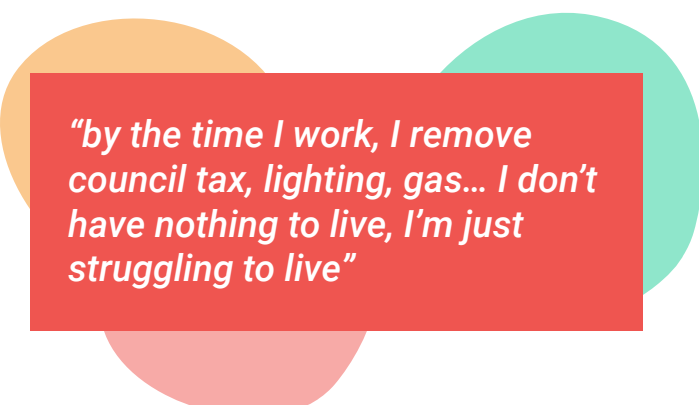
For **refugees and some migrant workers subject to immigration restrictions**, their immigration status is an additional barrier to work. Many reported that previous work experience and qualifications gained outside the UK not being recognised by employers was a barrier to good work. In addition, having English language needs further reduced access to good work and support. As a result, many had taken entry-level jobs, often in service sectors and were struggling to make ends meet.

People from minority backgrounds shared instances of discrimination and racism in employment. Issues raised included feeling like they were offered lower-skilled jobs than white jobseekers, not having the same networks to tap into, and hitting a glass ceiling when trying to progress into senior positions.

People with experience of the criminal justice system were found to face unique challenges and experiences, including significant stigma from society and employers, which inhibits their ability to reintegrate into society. This is exacerbated by a lack of effective

employment and skills provision in the prison system and when going through the probation system. *“The Job Centre isn’t going to be able to change society’s attitudes [towards people with prior convictions]” (Anthony).*

Londoners with low-skills or stuck in low-wage jobs can find themselves trapped in a cycle that leaves them struggling to make ends meet. Whilst training offers an opportunity to upskill and enter higher-paid roles, taking time off work was cited to have cost implications that most cannot afford. Furthermore, a lack of in-work support makes it difficult to make the transition to better paid work and this means that service users can be stuck in low paying jobs. The approach of getting service users to take any job without a package of ongoing support does not align with getting people into ‘good work’.



“by the time I work, I remove council tax, lighting, gas... I don’t have nothing to live, I’m just struggling to live”

The research has highlighted that service users in the different priority groups do face significant challenges in accessing employment and employment support, and often rely on personal and community networks for help.

Service providers feel the integration of services could be improved

Most providers surveyed (79%) reported that their organisations are involved in improving the integration of employment and skills services, locally or sub-regionally. However, less than half (41%) reported that their service is already integrated or quite integrated through sustained service collaboration with the wider employment and skills system in the area(s) they operate.

While service providers were often much more positive about the current system than service users, there was still a recognition amongst service providers that the system is not working as well as it could. The appetite from service providers for a system that is integrated and working well is clear, and many talked about the potential for employment, skills and training providers to better collaborate.

Providers frequently cited that a refocussing on supporting service users to make the best decisions was needed, rather than the current dominant focus on meeting numerical targets.

Despite the challenges and limitations, there is evidence of good practice when it comes to integration, with many service providers having strong links to community organisations, colleges, charities, employers and external agencies to best support Londoners.



Recommendations to improve integration of employment and skills services

Through this work providers came together from each of London's sub regions to consider the early findings and co-create recommendations. These interconnected recommendations fall into the following key themes depicted below and described at high level in the following pages.



1. Making funding and targets more human-centred

The need to **tailor targets and funding** to better-enable service providers to meet the requirements of Londoners seeking employment, training and skills was highlighted by several stakeholders. For the GLA and its commissioning partners, there is an opportunity to **develop and test new ways of funding and measuring outcomes**. Suggestions included finding ways of capturing success on an individual's journey into an employment opportunity, for instance measuring whether someone is satisfied in their new post, the job 'fit', and whether they have accessed mental health support as part of pre-work readiness preparation.

2. Building skills and knowledge among service providers

Both service providers and service users said **frontline staff need better training and continuing professional development support** to provide holistic and service user-centred support. The success of employment and skills support services rests on targets and funding being adjusted to provide more time and space for service providers to focus on the individual needs of jobseekers, rather than rushing them into jobs or training to meet targets. There is an opportunity for the GLA and its strategic partners, including London's boroughs and JobCentre Plus London, to **commission and pilot a holistic training package for frontline staff** that integrates modules including; understanding mental health, supporting people with SEND and trauma-informed approaches.

3. Offering personalised support for service users

Services that focus on making customer appointments with employment advisors or work coaches more accessible and service user-centred were recommended. This ranged from basics such as **remembering a service user's name, to having one main contact for each service user** at their point of entry into the skills and employment system, and giving them **longer appointments with work coaches**.

4. Tailoring support to specific groups

Solutions focusing on the needs of young people were highlighted as a priority by service providers including providing **in-school and college support** for students not going to university, for instance through CV development workshops, and post-school support once young people are in work. Service providers proposed the need for more **research and training** to understand the job types that young people, and other priority group, are being steered into and what good work looks like for them. This should go hand in hand with the **evaluation of services** to assess whether they meet the needs of priority groups and address the challenges they face

5. Sharing data and information better

Sharing information and data effectively between services was identified as a key enabler to integration. Service providers at the sub-regional and borough-level proposed the creation of an **online portal** for service users and service providers that could provide a live view of services and organisations available in a local area. There are opportunities for Integration Hubs to have oversight over skills and employment provision in London, including **mapping services available**, and working with providers to ensure there is no duplication.

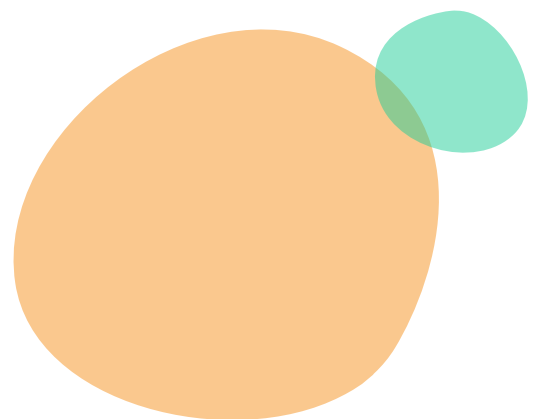
6. Working more closely with employers

There is clear potential for service providers to create and strengthen links with employers. Some solutions could be facilitated by Integration Hubs **engaging employers in existing initiatives** such as the Mayor's Good Work Standard and the Disability Confident Scheme. Bigger investments may be required to implement some of the solutions put forward by service providers such as offering **supported apprenticeships and opportunities for work experience** or subsidising businesses to take on employees.

7. Strengthening community connections

Personal and community networks play a key role in supporting many people seeking work in London, particularly those with English language needs. There is potential for formal service providers to establish and strengthen links with community organisations, who often have access to the 'harder to reach' groups. With additional funding, service providers could collaborate **with community groups to hire 'navigators' or peer supporters** who can reach new customers and refer them to employment and skills support. This has the potential to provide crucial additional capacity to support meaningful coproduction with residents to design provision which respond to their needs.

Further detail about each of these recommendations, including what success might look like if adopted can be found in the full research report [here](#)



Conclusions on system change and the need for greater collaboration through No Wrong Door

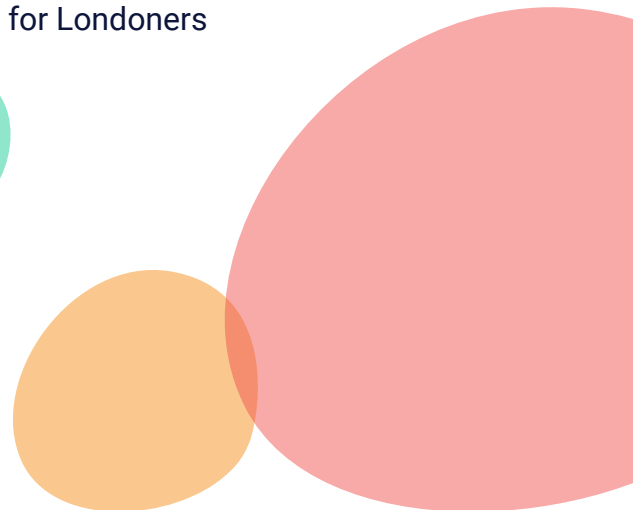
Within the system of support for Londoners trying to find 'good work' there are clear opportunities to strengthen and better-integrate services. Service providers often cited being frustrated and constrained by current funding structures and targets that often fail to value progress made on a person's individual journey to finding 'good work'. This could involve seeking support for mental health or finding reliable accommodation.

Targets that focus on getting jobseekers into jobs quickly have, in some places, led to competition rather than collaboration between services. Employment advisors are disincentivised from offering tailored support, and customers feel powerless and undervalued in the current target-driven culture. This environment is stressful for frontline staff and dehumanising for people seeking support.

While there are numerous challenges to integrating parts of a complex system, there is clearly an appetite and energy for change, and for partnership working to improve outcomes for residents. There are also examples of good practice to build on and a willingness to share learning between service providers. Where colleges, charities and employers are integrated with frontline employment services, jobseekers benefit through better and more sustainable work outcomes, and 'hard to reach' groups are offered better

support to get them closer to, and into, the job market. The opportunity areas set out in this report require a joined-up and long-term approach to systems-change. New solutions and interventions will need to combine 'top-down' structural, funding and policy approaches, with 'bottom-up' approaches which harness the skills, expertise and capabilities of a wide range of partners including communities, residents, and frontline practitioners.

In finding solutions to help the system become more human-centred, one core challenge will be keeping sight of the ambition to support people into 'good work' while grappling with the structures and systems that prevent effective support from being delivered. The No Wrong Door programme provides a solid foundation for policymakers, funders, providers and communities to develop a shared understanding of the challenges, and work in partnership to deliver sustainable solutions for Londoners





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