

Careers advice for longer lives

May 2023

Introduction

With many of us living longer lives than our parents' and grandparents' generations, many people will want or need to work for longer. In a world of fast-moving economic, technological and ecological change, it is now widely accepted that for many of us, the ability to change roles, reskill and switch sectors is becoming increasingly important. And, as the responsibility for saving enough for our retirements falls increasingly on people's participation in workplace pension schemes, being able to find good work that enables us to save is important to our financial security in retirement.

Making the transition to a labour market that provides good quality work with adequate pensions and supports people to switch jobs and careers is a complex challenge, and requires action from government, employers, education providers and more. In this briefing note, we explore one particular dimension of what is needed – access to good quality careers advice throughout adult life.

We look at:

- What are people's expectations about job moves and career changes?
- What are people's reasons for changing jobs?
- What holds people back from making job and career changes?
- Who takes action on their future careers, and what actions are they taking?
- What careers support do people want?

Principally, we draw on new polling of 3,345 UK adults aged 16 to 75 that we have conducted online with Ipsos in April 2023. We also draw on focus groups among people in mid-life who are dissatisfied at work conducted for us by Message House, and on polling we have conducted for previous Phoenix Insights reports, such as our Longer Lives Index survey conducted in summer 2021 with Frontier Economics, and polling of people over 50 conducted with Public First as part of our research into economic inactivity.

Changing careers can feel scary, with many people reporting they feel they lack knowledge or confidence about what is out there. And people who have been in work for some time often feel like they have something to lose, whether it is job security, familiarity, status or the knowledge that they are able to support dependents.

We know that progress is possible, recognizing the improvement that has been achieved over last five to ten years in careers guidance for young people in education. If more people were aware of the career opportunities out there at all stages of life, and were better equipped and supported in how to make those changes, we believe we can see a revolution in how people navigate their longer working lives.

At Phoenix Insights, we will be taking the findings from this research into a broader programme of work collaborating with a range of partners who share our vision for much greater access to adult careers advice.

Key findings

Changing careers

- Our Longer Lives Index shows that only a third of young adults (aged 25-34) expect to have a single career for life. Among those aged 45-54, a third expect to change career before they retire.
- The biggest motivators for changing jobs are better pay and job security, particularly among women (aged 16-75). The biggest barriers are a lack of confidence, worries about being either too old or too young to make a change, they don't feel confident enough or that they can't afford it.
- When asked what actions adults aged 16-75 have taken about their careers in the last 6 months, 40 per cent of adults have not done anything. The most common actions that were taken were to think about future options for themselves, to have conversations with family and friends about their future options and to look for information online.

Getting help

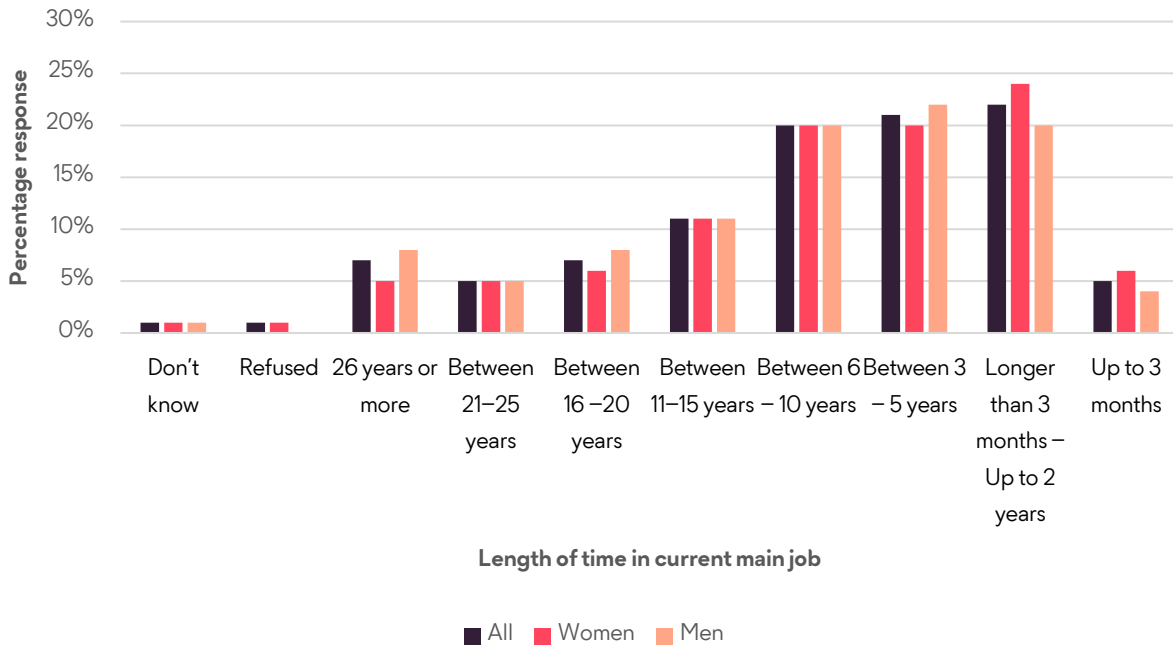
- Awareness of careers information and advice services is low, and is lowest among older age groups. Only around a fifth of adults say they have heard of the National Careers Service, UCAS Careers Advice or the UK Careers Fair.
- Those who have received careers advice in the past 3 years reported a range of positive benefits, in particular how it helped them to realise the many different work opportunities available to them (68% agreeing), and to understand their own strengths and skills (65% agreeing).
- Despite these low levels of action and low awareness, when invited to think about it we found that 44 per cent of adults would be interested in getting information about what their options in relation to work, and yet 44 per cent had never thought about getting careers advice previously,
- People who would take up careers advice are particularly interested in getting information about how they can use their skills in different jobs, and the different types of jobs or careers that might be available to them.

All key findings are from Ipsos online research for Phoenix Insights, UK adults aged 16 to 75 – 21st-24th April 2023.

What are people’s expectations about job moves and career changes?

A little over a quarter (27 per cent) of all adults have been in their current job for less than two years, as shown in Figure 1 below. A slightly larger proportion (30 per cent) say they have been in their current job for 11 years or more.

Figure 1: Length of time in current main job

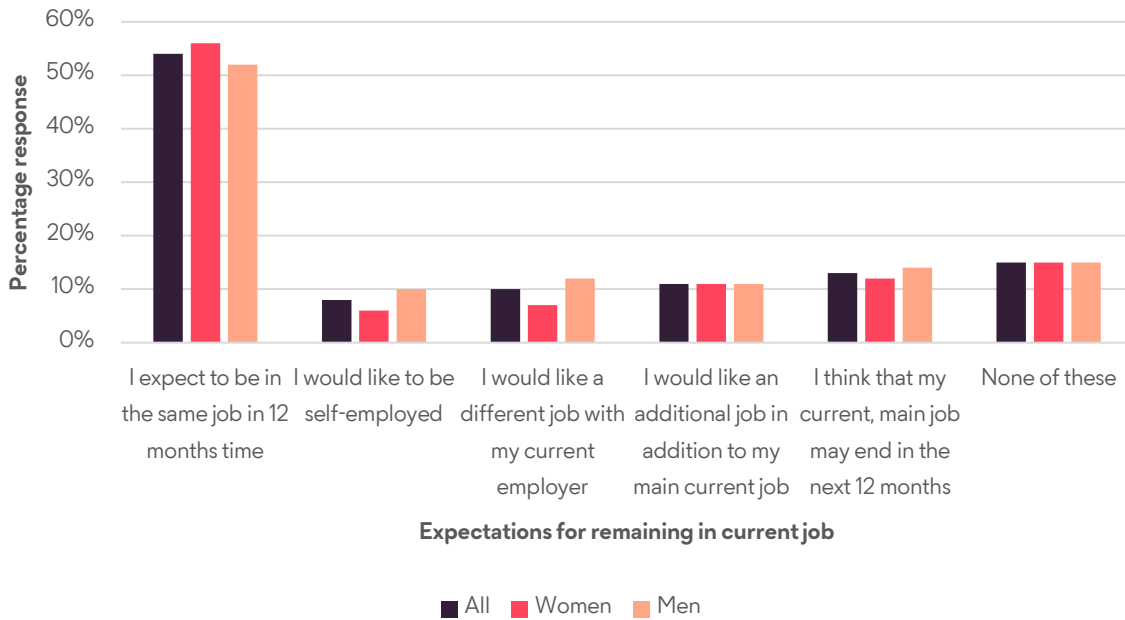


Source: Ipsos online research for Phoenix Insights, UK adults aged 16 to 75

[Base: All adults who are employed or self-employed (2,260)]

When asked if they expect to be in the same job in another 12 months, just over half of people (54 per cent) said yes, as shown in Figure 2. This proportion increases with age and rises to 65 per cent amongst those aged 55 – 75 years old.

Figure 2: Expectations for remaining in current job

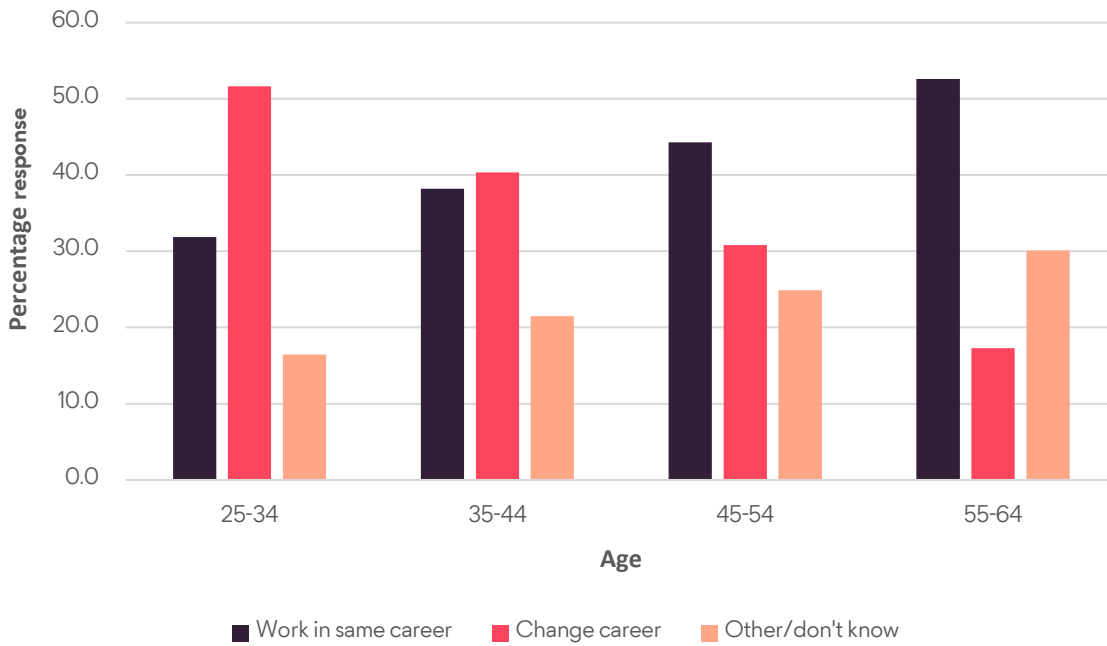


Source: Ipsos online research for Phoenix Insights, UK adults aged 16 to 75 – 21st-24th April 2023

[Base: All adults who are employed or self-employed (2,260)]

When considering their careers overall, rather than just the next year or the next job move, most people expect to change career at least once during their working life, as shown in Figure 3 below. Only a third of young adults (aged 25-34) expect to have a single career for life. Among those aged 45-54, a third expect to change career before they retire.

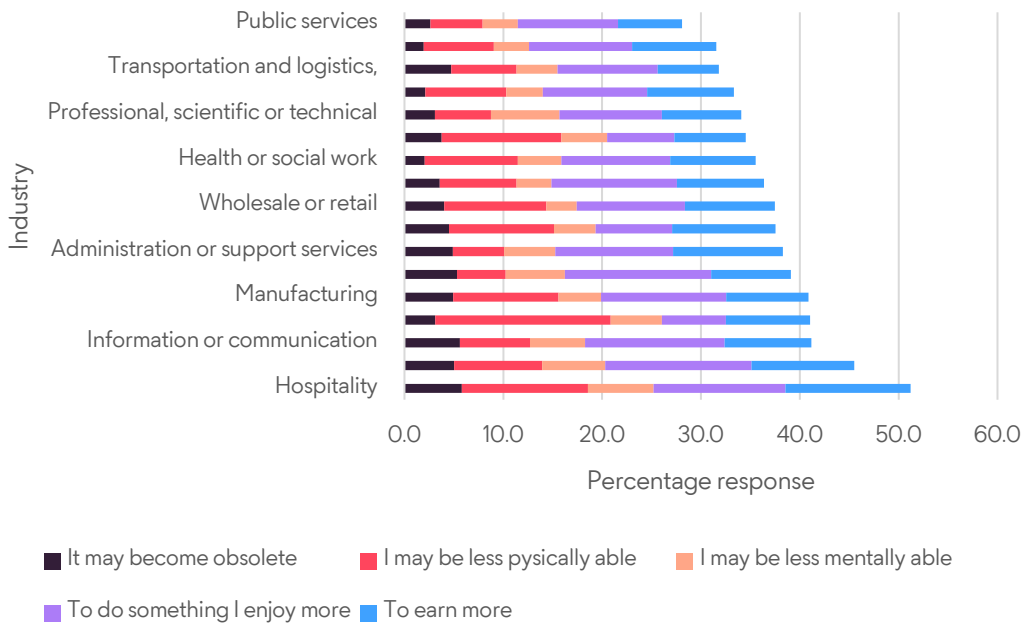
Figure 3: Expectations for future career changes



Source: UK adults 25+, from Phoenix Insights Longer Lives Index

Expectations of career change vary across industries, as shown in Figure 4. Those in hospitality are the most likely to expect to change career, for all age groups. In contrast, those in public services are the least likely to expect to change career.

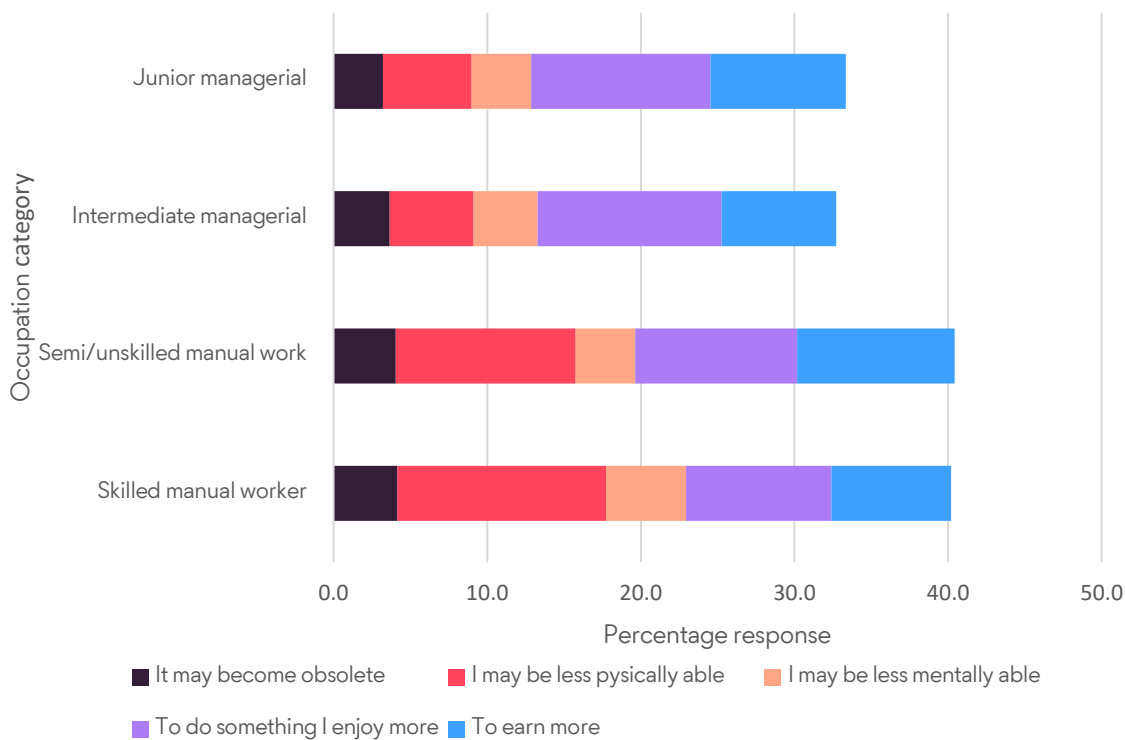
Figure 4: Proportion of people expecting to change career, by industry and reason for change



Source: UK adults 25+, from Phoenix Insights Longer Lives Index

In terms of type of role, casual workers are those most likely to expect to change career (47 per cent), followed by those in higher managerial occupations and manual occupations (around 40 per cent), as shown in Figure 5 below. Those in manual occupations are particularly more likely to expect to change career due to their physical health becoming a barrier. This is anticipated by 12 per cent of those in semi-skilled or unskilled manual work, and 14 per cent of those in skilled manual work.

Figure 5: Proportion of people expecting to change career, by occupation category and reason for change

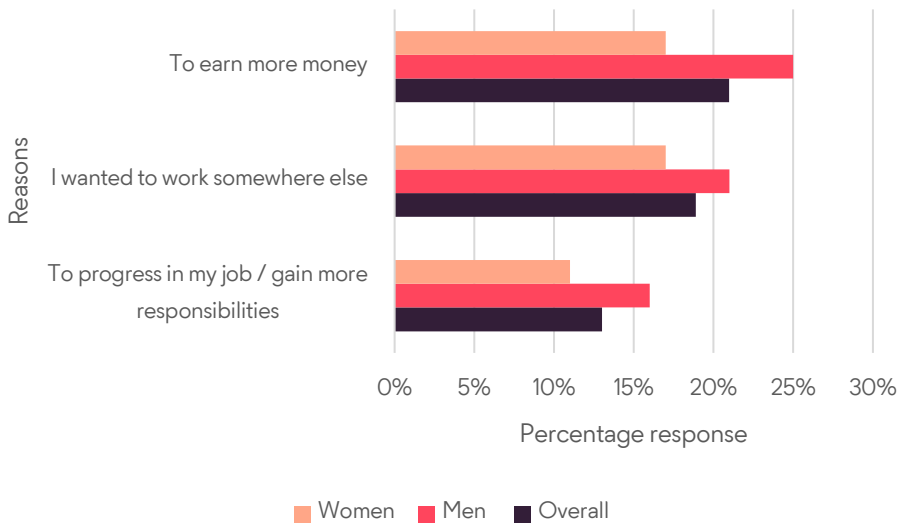


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What are people’s reasons for changing jobs?

People can leave their jobs due to both the positive ‘pull’ factors of an alternative and the negative ‘push’ factors about their current job. When asked to explain why they left their previous job, the most common reason given by those who have had more than one job was to earn more money, as shown in Figure 6 below. Women were over three times more likely than men to cite caring responsibilities (for a child/adult) as the reason they left their last job, and also significantly more likely to give the reason of needing to better manage a health condition.

Figure 6: Top three reasons given for last job move



Source: Ipsos online research for Phoenix Insights, UK adults aged 16 to 75 – 21st -24th April 2023

[Base: All adults who have had more than one job (2,457)]

In our research into the high levels of economic inactivity among people 50 after the pandemic, we found poor job satisfaction to be an important factor in determining whether people in this age group chose to leave the workforce. Analysis of longitudinal data on job satisfaction in the Understanding Society survey suggests that those leaving the workforce in their 50s on average see declining job satisfaction in the years running up to their departure from the labour market, as shown in Figure 7 below. In contrast, job satisfaction is seen to increase slightly for those not dropping out of the workforce.

Figure 7: Self-reported job satisfaction among those aged 40-49 in 2009/10, by future decision to leave the workforce (1 = completely dissatisfied, 7 = completely satisfied)

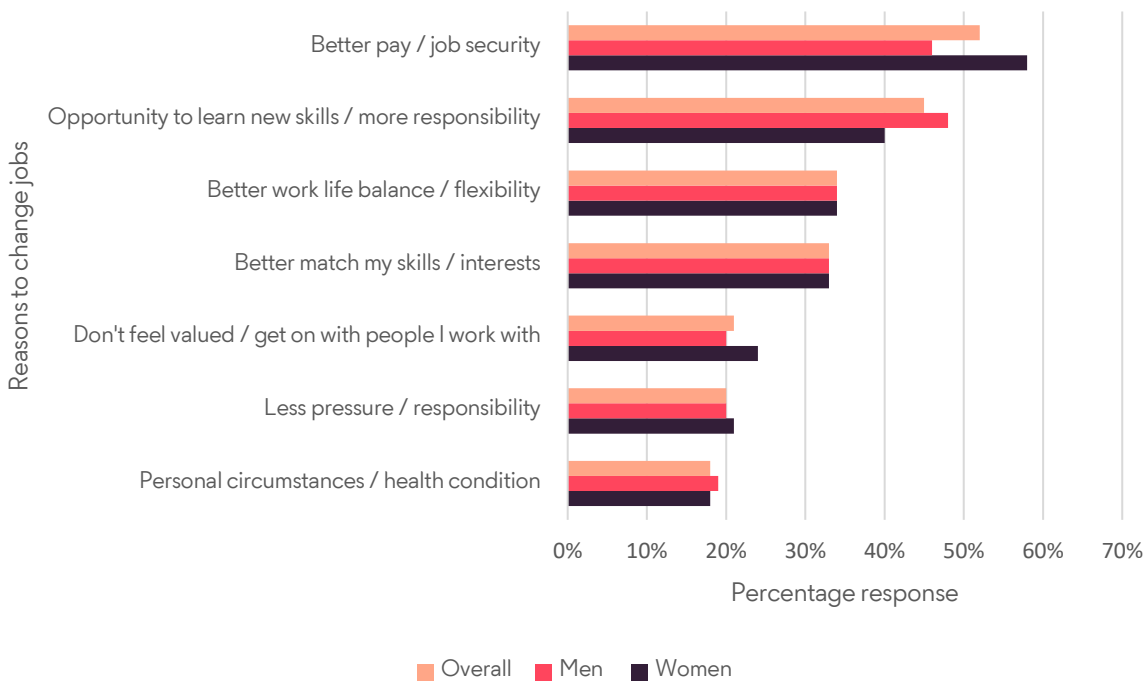


Source: Public First analysis of Understanding Society for Phoenix Insights

[Also used in our [Beyond the Great Retirement](#) report]

Looking at their next move, when we asked people who had expressed a desire to change jobs what their biggest motivators were, better pay and job security came out strongly, particularly for women, as shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Reasons for wanting to change jobs¹



Source: Ipsos online research for Phoenix Insights, UK adults aged 16 to 75 – 21st – 24th April 2023

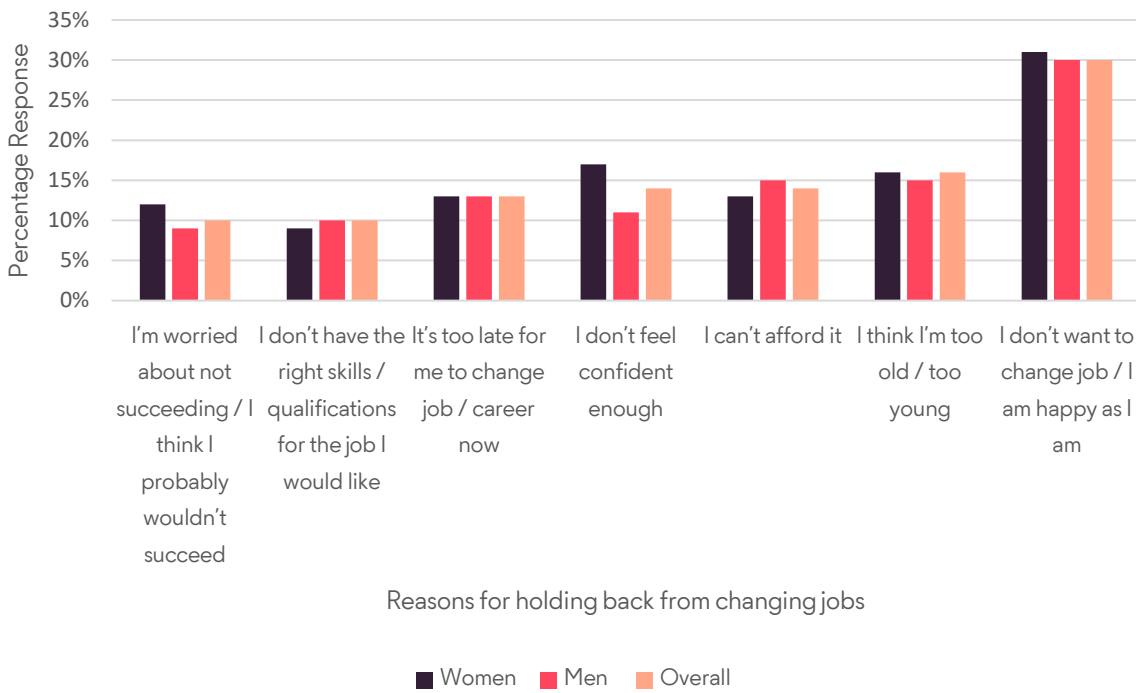
[Base: All adults who would like to change jobs (821)]

What holds people back from making job and career changes?

Despite these clear push and pull factors that motivate people’s job moves, when asked if anything holds them back from changing jobs, people provided a range of answers were provided among those in employment as shown in Figure 9. A lack of confidence was particularly prominent for women, and both men and women worried about being either too old or too young to make a change, or that they wouldn’t be able to afford it.

Figure 9: Which, if any of the following, are holding you back from changing jobs? – Top reasons

¹ Pay/job security includes: Increasing my earnings, I am worried about my job security in my current job, my contract is ending and to work more hours, Opportunity to learn new skills / more responsibility: I want more responsibility / to progress in my career, to develop new skills, I want to try something new / do something different, I have seen other people who have done this successfully, better worklife balance/flexibility: To have a better work-life balance, To have more flexibility, to fit with my caring responsibilities, Better match my skills / interests: To use skills I already have which I am not currently using, To apply new skills I have learnt, To work in an area which interests me more, Don't feel valued/get on with people I work with: I do not feel appreciated / valued in my current job, I do not get on with the other people I work with, Less pressure / responsibility: I want less responsibility / less pressure, to work fewer hours, Personal circumstances/health condition: Personal circumstances e.g. I am moving for reasons unrelated to work, A health condition / disability, Travel difficulties getting to my current job



Source: Ipsos online research for Phoenix Insights, UK adults aged 16 to 75 – 21st – 24th April 2023

[Base: All adults who are employed or self-employed (2,260)]

These themes came through clearly in our focus group research too, with a lack of confidence as the most widely cited barrier.

I think as you get a little bit older, especially if you've not been working for a while or you've got other situations going on, **you can lose your confidence.**

Female, in work

When men in our focus groups spoke of financial concerns, some spoke in terms of the 'selfishness' of making a change, particularly if it involved accepting a lower level of pay in return for following a new career path.

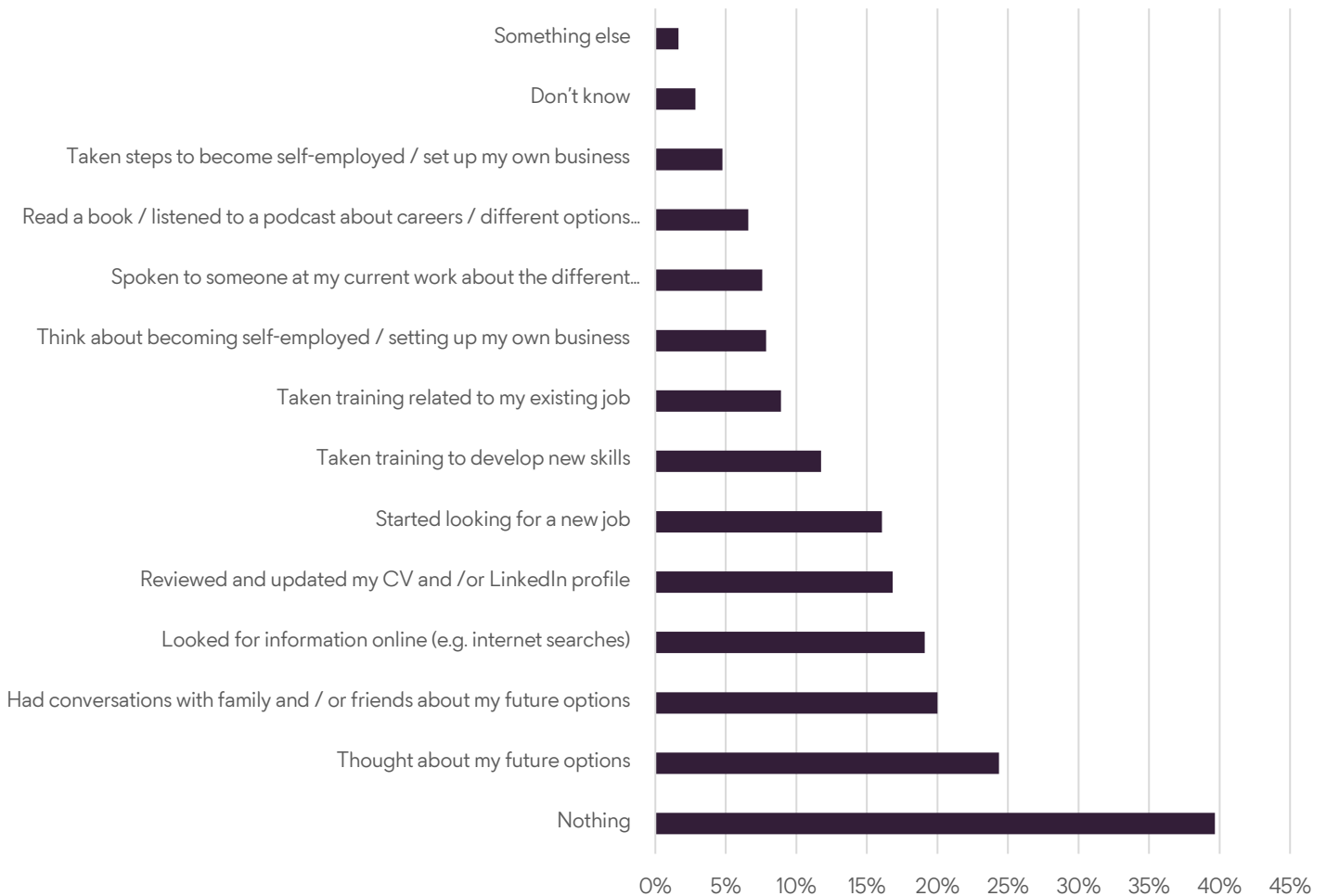
It's quite selfish... If it all goes wrong, then you've egg all over your face and nobody's talking to you, so it's very much a risk [to change].

Male, in work

Who takes action on their future careers, and what actions are they taking?

When asked what actions people have taken about their careers in the last six months, 40 per cent of people have not done anything, as shown in Figure 10 below. The most common actions that were taken were to think about future options for themselves, to have conversations with family and friends about future options and to look for information online (e.g. internet searches). Interestingly, women were slightly more likely than men to have said they have taken action.

Figure 10: Actions taken in relation to your career in the past six months

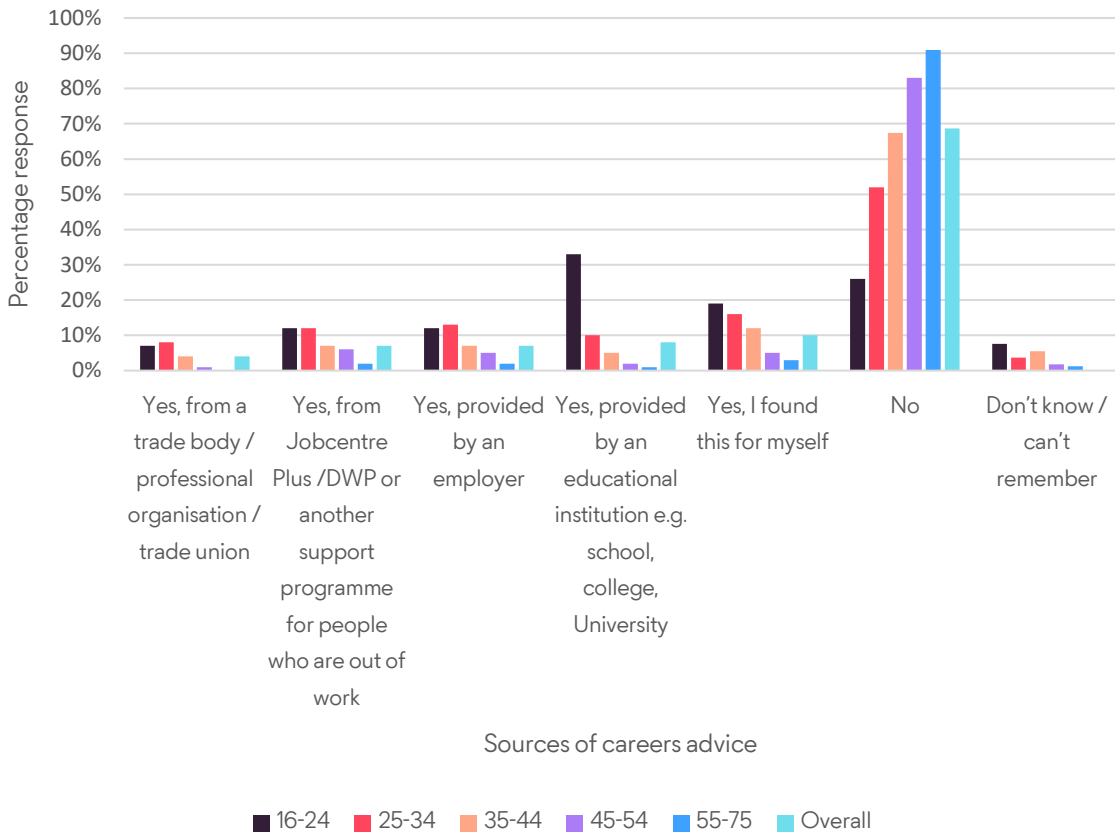


Source: Ipsos online research for Phoenix Insights, UK adults aged 16 to 75 – 21st – 24th April 2023

[Base: All adults 16-75 (3,345)]

When it comes to careers advice specifically, those in the younger age groups are much more likely to have received careers advice in the last three years, with two thirds (66 per cent) of 16-24 year olds compared to only 15 per cent of 45-54 year olds. As shown in Figure 11 below, for younger people, this advice tended to have come from an educational institution.

Figure 11: Have you received any careers advice in the last three years?

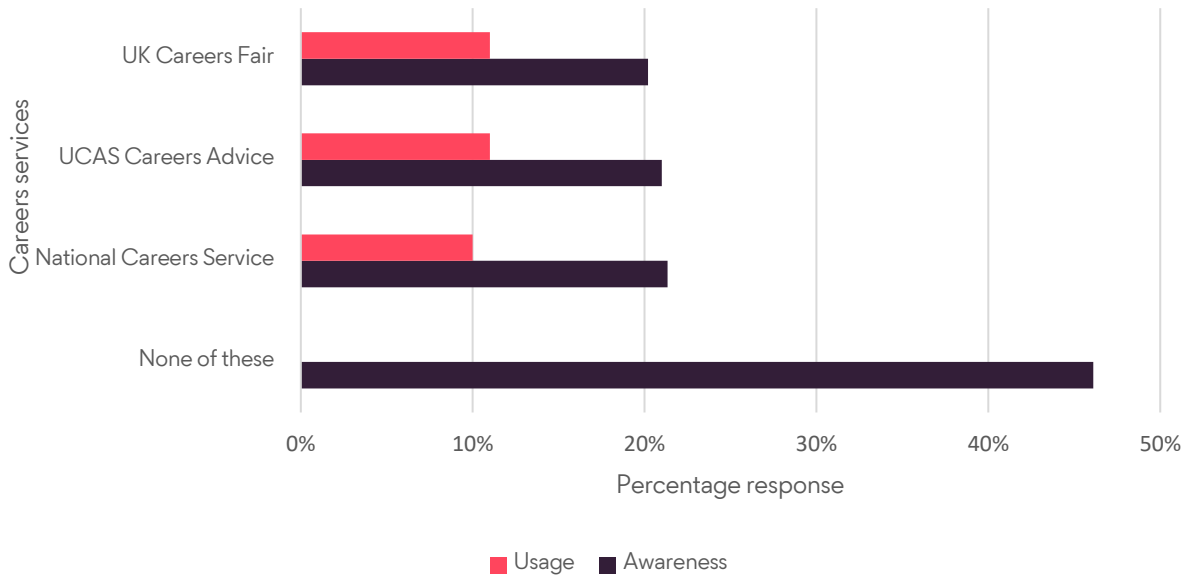


Source: Ipsos online research for Phoenix Insights, UK adults aged 16 to 75 – 21st – 24th April 2023

[Base: All adults 16-75 (3,345)]

Overall, we found that awareness of careers information and advice services is low, with only around a fifth of adults having heard of the National Careers Service, UCAS Careers Advice and UK Careers Fair, and shown in Figure 12. Awareness for all these groups is lower among older age groups.

Figure 12: Awareness and usage of most prominent existing careers services – Top mentions

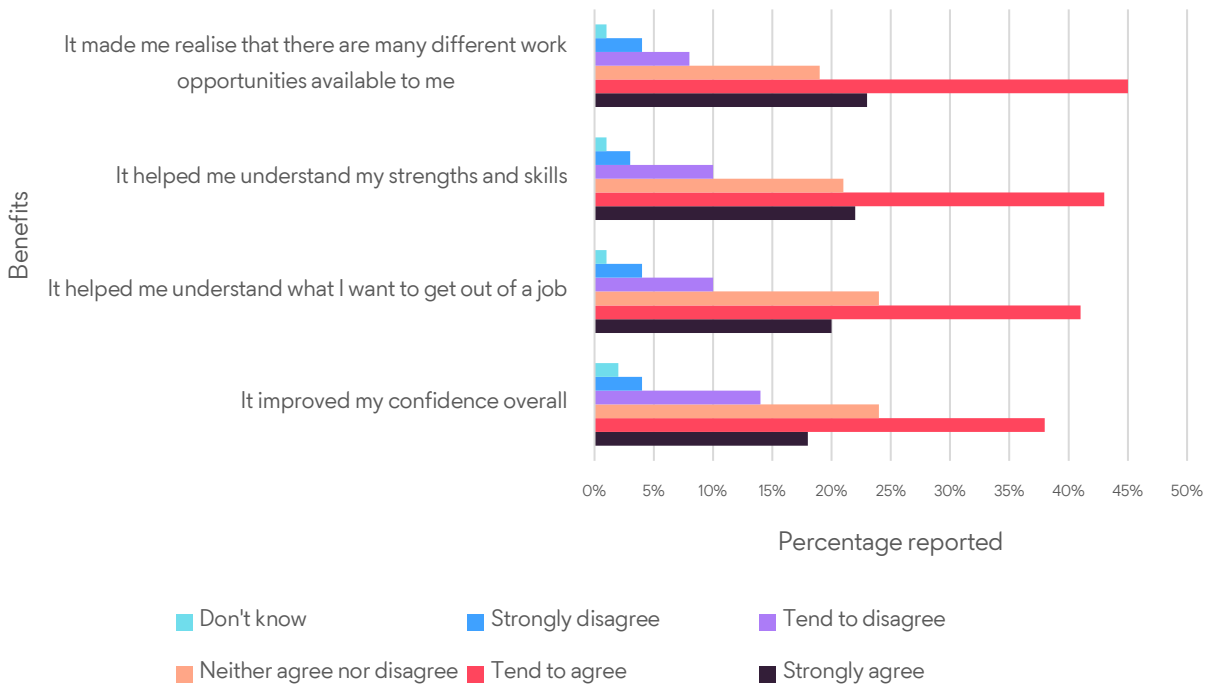


Source: Ipsos online research for Phoenix Insights, UK adults aged 16 to 75 – 21st – 24th April 2023

[Base: All adults 16-75 (3,345)]

For the minority of people who have accessed careers advice in the last 3 years, people reported a range of positive benefits were reported (Figure 13). In particular, people reported how it helped them to realise that there are many different work opportunities available to them (69 per cent), and to understand their own strengths and skills (65 per cent agreeing).

Figure 13: Reported benefits of accessing careers advice



Source: Ipsos online research for Phoenix Insights, UK adults aged 16 to 75 – 21st – 24th April 2023

[Base: All adults who had received careers advice (559)]

What careers support do people want?

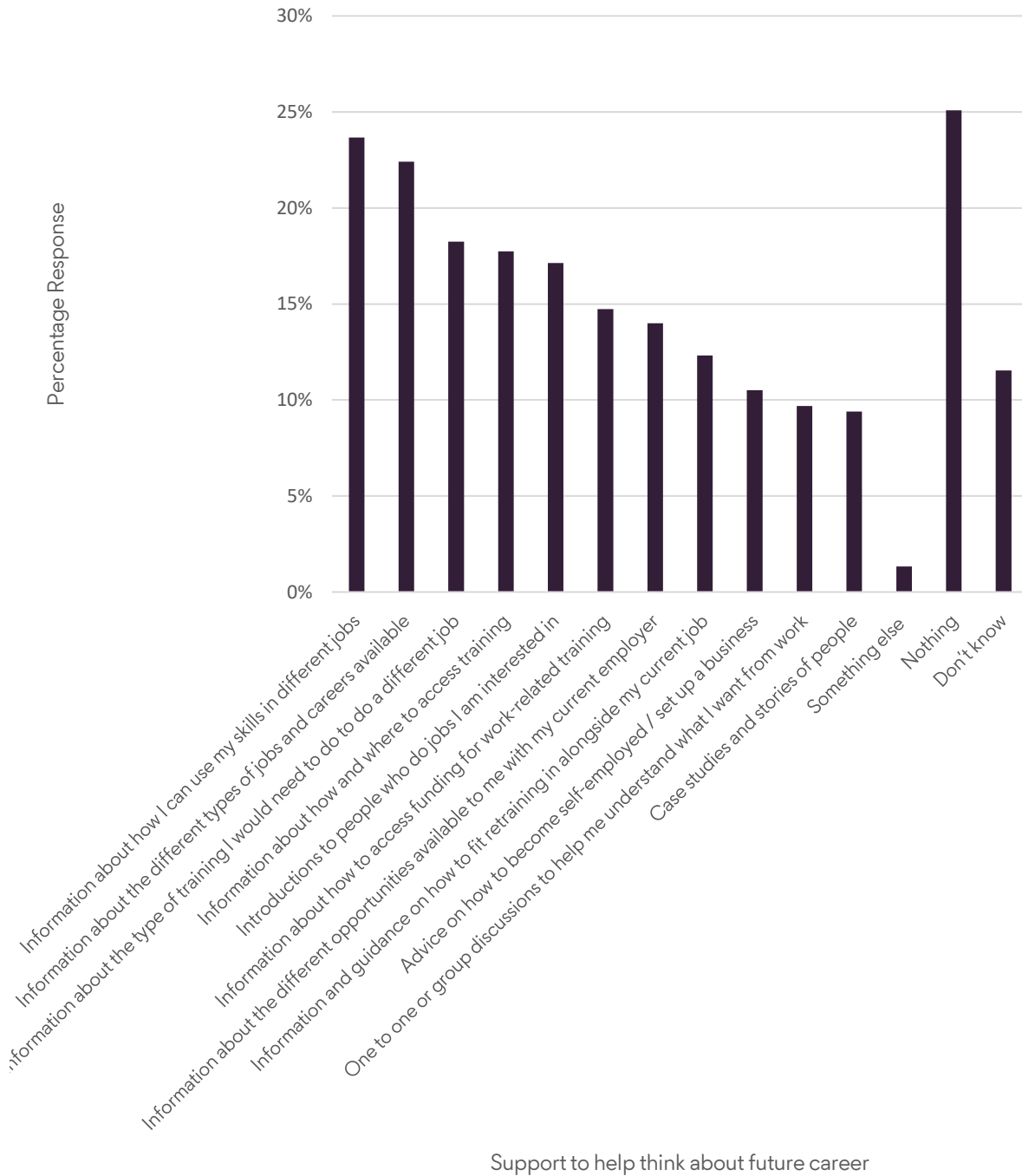
Despite these low levels of action and low awareness, when invited to think about it we found that 68 per cent of adults would be interested in getting information about their options in relation to work and yet the same proportion (44 per cent) had never thought about getting careers advice previously.

We also wanted to explore what careers advice and support means for people specifically. When asked what support would be most useful, the most popular answer was for information about how they could use their skills in different jobs, and the different types of jobs or careers that might be available to them (see Figure 15).

This was echoed in our focus groups, where people recognised how little they knew about alternative careers, and described wanting support that opens up ideas about what might be possible.

I'm looking for another role, one that pays more obviously, but **I don't really know where to start at my kind of age.**
Male, in work

Figure 14: What support would be most useful to you in thinking about your future career?

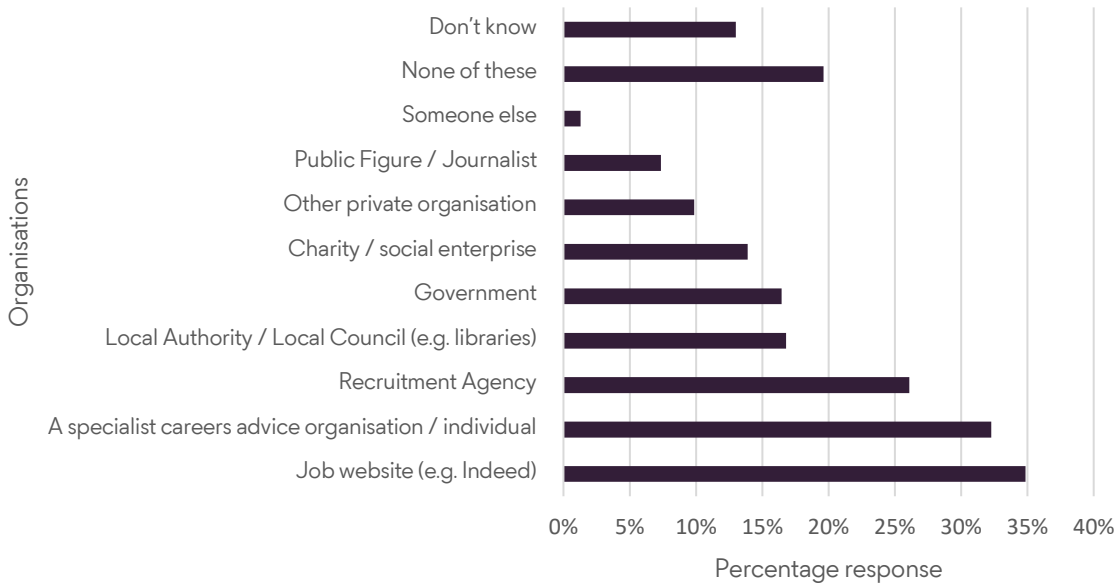


Source: Ipsos online research for Phoenix Insights, UK adults aged 16 to 75 – 21st – 24th April 2023

[Base: All adults 16-75 (3,345)]

In terms of preferred sources for this advice, we found that job websites (35 per cent), specialist careers advice organisations/individuals (32 per cent) and recruitment agencies (26 per cent) are most likely to be picked as shown in Figure 15. Local authorities (17 per cent), government (16 per cent) or charities (14 per cent) were chosen less often.

Figure 15: Which, if any, of the following organisations would you take careers advice from?



Source: Ipsos online research for Phoenix Insights, UK adults aged 16 to 75 – 21st – 24th April 2023

[Base: All adults 16-75 (3,345)]

Conclusions

It is perhaps easy to underestimate both the power of inertia in people's working lives, and the knowledge, confidence and bravery it can take to make major job or career moves. But the macroeconomic reality of delivering a large scale shift in the UK economy to green technologies, say, or to respond to developments in digital technology and AI, will require potentially millions of us to take these brave and risky individual decisions. It is therefore crucial that opportunities are available for people of all ages to get good quality careers information, advice and support.

When people are invited to consider it, we find significant latent demand for these services. But as things stand at present, few of us are taking proactive action ourselves, few of us are aware of the support that already exists, or assume (particularly if we are older) that it is not targeted at us and so don't seek it out.

We know that progress is possible, recognizing the improvement that has been achieved in careers guidance for young people in education. The Gatsby Foundation estimate there are 11 million adults in England who could

benefit from careers advice or guidance². If more people were aware of the career opportunities out there at all stages of life, and were better equipped and supported in how to make those changes, we believe we can see a revolution in how people navigate their longer working lives and find their place in the economy of the future.

At Phoenix Insights, we are launching a new “Careers can change” campaign to inspire people to see that careers can change successfully, whether small incremental shifts within the same company or industry or a significant pivot. We want to support people to make more informed choices about career changes by connecting them to information, services and organisations that can help them. The campaign, backed by a brilliant group of partners, is led by Phoenix Insights because we believe that changing careers can help people to improve, enjoy and extend their working lives. Phoenix Group is proud to be working with Amazing If, Brave Starts, CareerShifters, Enterprise Nation, Now Teach, Women Returners, the Learning and Work Institute and Postcards from Midlife Live.

Technical Note

* On behalf of Phoenix Insights, Ipsos conducted online interviews with a representative quota sample of 3,345 adults in the UK aged 16 – 75 years old. Sub group analysis is shown by gender (Male: 1,625 and Female: 1,701) and age (16 – 24 years: 482, 25 – 34 years: 632, 35 – 44 years: 583, 45 – 54 years: 595 and 55 – 75 years: 1,053). Fieldwork took place between 21st – 24th April 2023. Data were weighted to the known profile of those in this audience with quotas set by age, gender, social grade, working status and region.

² See: <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/education/programmes/good-career-guidance-for-adults>