

# The changing shape of the career profession in the UK

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**This** paper summarises the main findings of a survey of career professionals in the UK working in independent/private practice and of members of the National Association of Educational Guidance for Adults (NAEGA). These two groups represent the majority of career professionals working with adults and include both those working mainly in the private sector and those working in the public, education and voluntary sectors. The survey highlights similarities and differences in the background and working practices of these two groups but also shows the diversity in terms of experience and backgrounds of career professionals working in this sector. As the provision of career support for adults becomes more significant, implications for the career profession are discussed.



## Trends in career provision

Before the latest UK government changes to how career support is provided to young people in England, there were already significant changes taking place in the nature of career provision both in the UK and elsewhere. In particular, there was greater recognition of the need for career support for adults in employment (Jackson, 2010) and research NICEC carried out for Cedefop (2008) had noted the increased role of a range of intermediary organisations (ie not government/public sector or employers) across the EU in the provision of career support for people in employment.

Until recently, it would probably be fair to say that it has been assumed that in the UK most careers work is both with young people and is publicly funded. However, changes taking place in the world of work

mean that there is increasing demand for career support from adults – both those in employment and those making career transitions. While the launch of the National Careers Service in England in 2012 is a publicly-funded response to these trends, there has always been a small independent sector offering career support. Nevertheless, careers work with adults has always appeared to be the ‘poor relation’ in the careers world. Before the launch of the National Careers Service, many publicly-funded initiatives aimed at adults had only short-term or partial funding and other research (Hirsh and Jackson, 2003; Cedefop, 2008) has highlighted the fragmented and often short-lived nature of many career initiatives inside organisations.

However, relatively little is known about the provision of career support for adults especially that which is not publicly funded. The only attempt to review the scale and nature of the private sector in career development was a small-scale study conducted in 2005 (Watts, Hughes & Wood, 2005). A more recent iCeGS study examined different ‘who pays?’ models and the impact of technology on this market (Hooley, Hutchinson & Watts, 2010).

While there have always been a number of large-scale providers working in the outplacement market, in recent years it appears that there has been a growth in the number of individual career counsellors/coaches working both inside and outside organisations and with all age-groups. However, relatively little is known about how this increasingly significant sector of the careers world operates. This was one reason why NICEC organised a half-day network event in September 2012 to explore questions about what it is like to operate in private practice. This exploratory survey of career professionals working in independent/private practice was initially conducted to provide

some context for the NICEC meeting but has since been extended to a larger audience. This paper summarises key findings from the survey which was conducted between July and October 2012.

The survey had two main aims:

1. To provide information about the career professionals working in this sector – their backgrounds, working arrangements, training and professional qualifications
2. To gather information on the range and type of services offered by these career professionals in order to get a better understanding of how career support is provided in these sectors

## The survey respondents

Independent career professionals were contacted using a number of different networks, such as LinkedIn groups, and through emails sent out by the ICG Private Practice Community and by ACPI to their members. This generated 157 replies but 25 were from people working outside the UK and were, therefore, excluded from the present analysis. In September 2012, an email about the survey was also circulated to members of the NAEGA, the main UK association for adult career guidance practitioners. NAEGA membership covers practitioners and staff working in further and higher education, adult and community learning, trade unions and employer bodies. An additional 189 replies were received so that, overall, the analysis is based on 321 replies and covers both those working with adults mainly in the private sector and those working in the public, education and voluntary sectors. This means that it provides the opportunity to compare the replies of career professionals across these two complementary, and to some degree overlapping, areas of work<sup>1</sup>.

## Training and qualifications: Well qualified

Nearly everyone (90%) reported that they had professional training directly relevant to their work as

<sup>1</sup> For convenience the two groups are referred to as independent career professionals and NAEGA members respectively.

a career coach/counsellor and of those with training just over half (51%) reported that they had had more than one form of specialised training, although NAEGA members (59%) were more likely to report that they had received only one sort of training than the independent career professionals (36%).

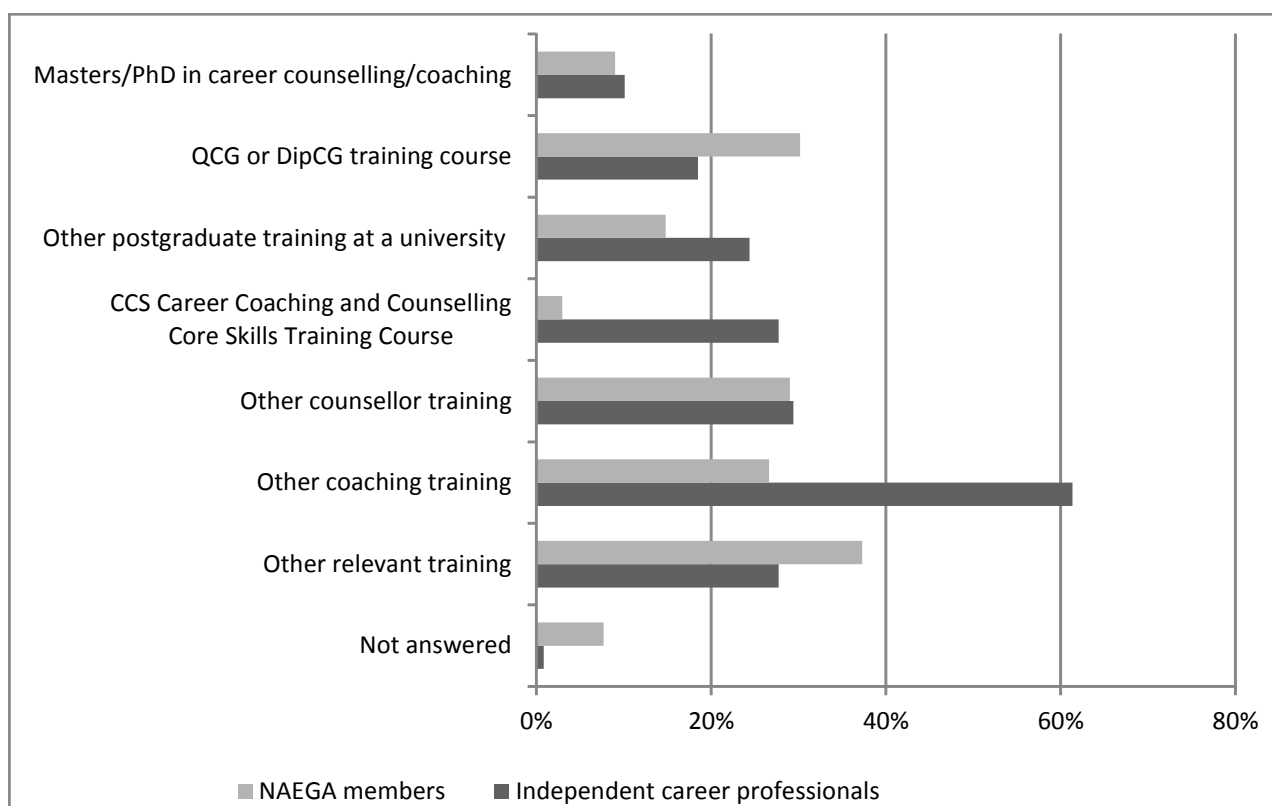
Just under half of those with training (48%) had completed some sort of postgraduate training at a university in career coaching/counselling with 30% of NAEGA members having a QCG or DipCG compared to 18% of independent career professionals, while independent career professionals (24%) were more likely to have received other postgraduate training in career coaching/counselling than NAEGA members (15%) (see Figure 1).

Most respondents also had other professional qualifications, although NAEGA members (73%) were less likely to have one than the independent career professionals (84%). NAEGA members were most likely to have a professional qualification in Education (35%) or Management (25%) but 30% had other professional qualifications. In contrast, independent career professionals were most likely to have an HR qualification (39%) or a Management qualification (36%), but 25% had other professional qualifications. In addition, nearly half (49%) of the independent career professionals and 37% of NAEGA members reported that they had a postgraduate degree.

## Background and experience

Most respondents were female (75%) but the survey also found that:

- NAEGA members tended to be younger than the independent career professionals. When those not giving their age are excluded, 22% of NAEGA members were under 40 compared to just 6% of independent career professionals, while 12% of NAEGA members were aged 60 and over compared to 22% of the independent career professionals.
- Over half (52%) the independent career professionals had 10 or more years' experience working as a career coach/counsellor compared to 37% of NAEGA members. In contrast, only 24% of independent career professionals had five

**Figure 1: Types of specialised training in career counselling/coaching**

years or less experience compared to a third of NAEGA members.

- Just under a third (32%) of independent career professionals compared to three-quarters of NAEGA members reported that they had worked in the public sector (ie Connexions/Local Authority Careers Service, a University/Higher Education Careers Service, Next Step, FE/Sixth Form College or other publicly-funded Careers Service).

## What are their working arrangements?

The majority did other work alongside their career counselling/coaching but independent career professionals (77%) were much more likely to be doing this than NAEGA members (53%). On the other hand, nearly two-thirds of NAEGA members (63%) were working full-time compared to just 44% of the independent career professionals. Female respondents were more likely to be working part-time than their male colleagues as were older respondents.

NAEGA members were also much more likely to be employed (77%) than independent career professionals (20%) and only 11% of NAEGA members worked independently compared to 64% of the independent career professionals.

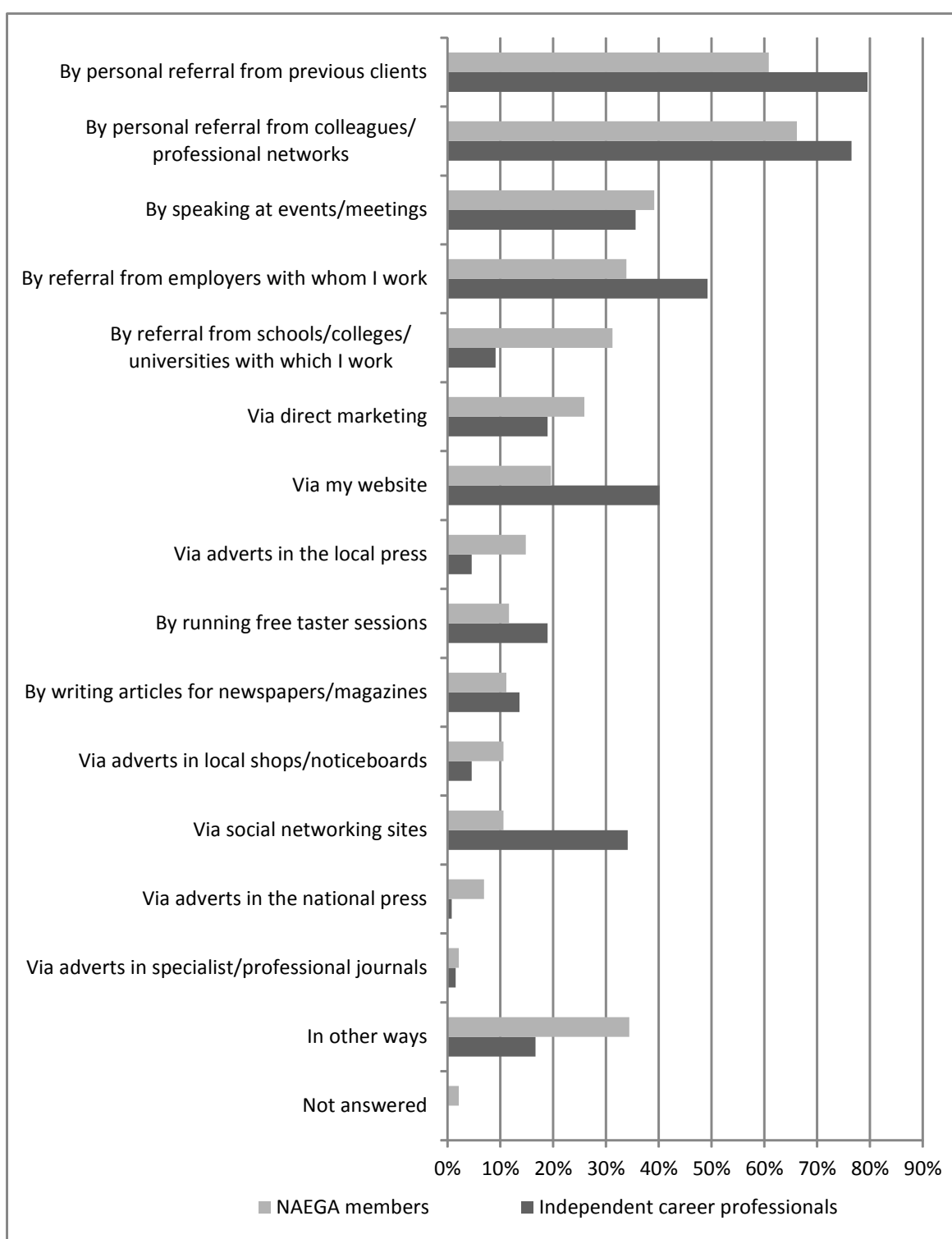
Those doing other work were asked what proportion of their time was spent doing career counselling/coaching. Most independent career professionals (62%) spent no more than half their time on career counselling/coaching with only 17% spending more than three-quarters of their time career counselling/coaching. A higher proportion of NAEGA members (44%) than independent career professionals (38%) spent more than half their time doing career counselling/coaching.

Over half (53%) the independent career professionals were based in London or the South East compared to only a quarter (24%) of the NAEGA members who were more evenly spread across England. The survey got very few responses (3%) from people based in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland and this may be a function of the way people were contacted to take part in the survey.

## How find/attract clients?

There are interesting similarities and differences in the ways that independent career professionals and NAEGA members find and attract clients. Personal referral either from previous clients or from professional colleagues/networks were the two most commonly mentioned methods by both groups (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Ways of finding/attracting clients**



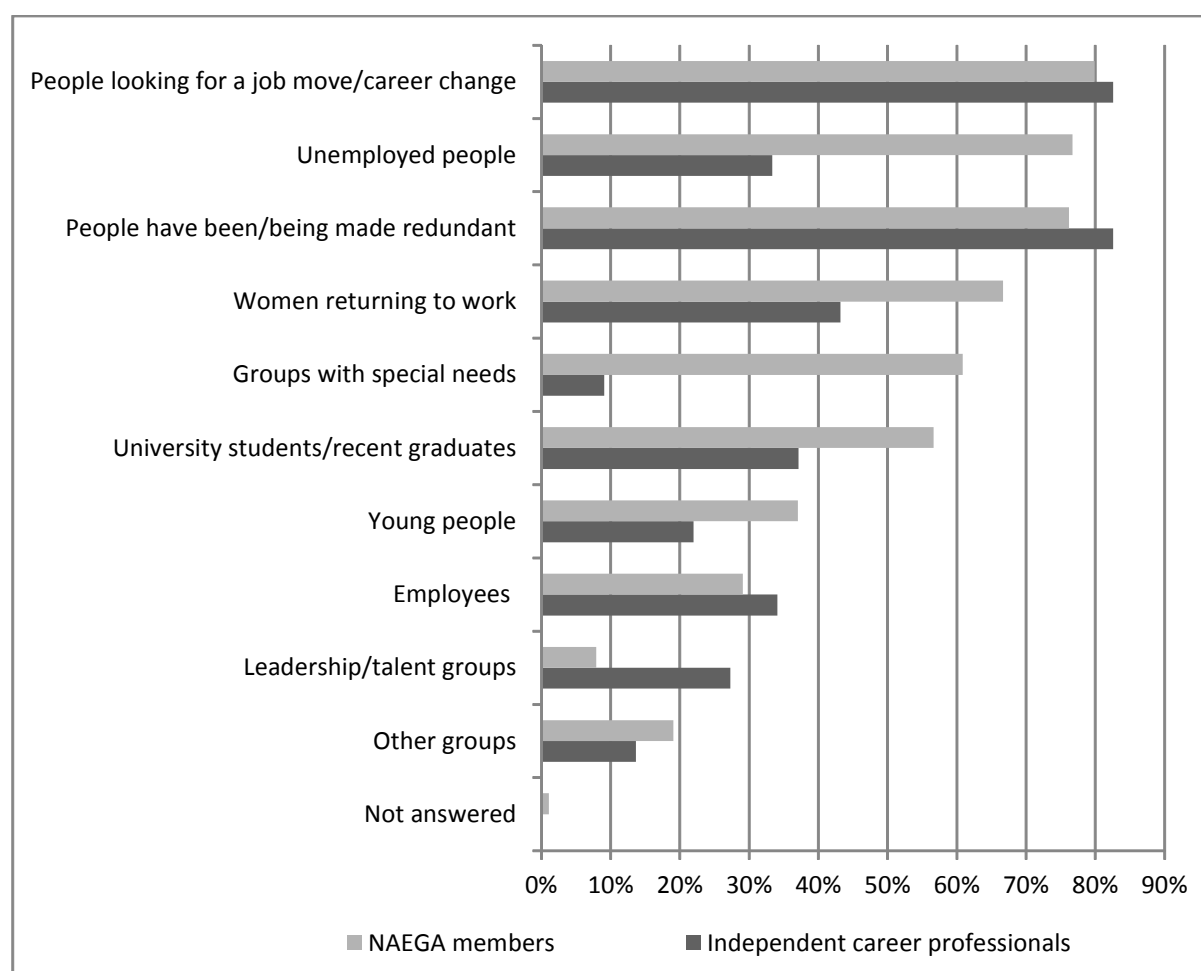
Independent career professionals also commonly mentioned referral from employers with whom they work (49%), websites (40%), speaking at events/meetings (36%) and using social networking sites (34%). For NAEGA members, speaking at events/meetings (39%), referral from employers with whom they work (34%) and from schools/colleges/universities with which they work (31%) were the next most common ways of finding and attracting clients. Far fewer NAEGA members mentioned using their websites (20%) or social networking (11%) to find or attract clients.

## What mix of services do they offer?

The most common groups of clients for independent

career professionals were those who were looking for a job move/career change (83%) or who had been made redundant (83%) (see Figure 3). In contrast, NAEGA members described working with a more diverse set of clients with more NAEGA members than independent career professionals working with people with special needs, such as offenders, homeless people or people with health or mental health problems (61% compared to 9%), university students/recent graduates (57% compared to 37%), young people (37% compared to 22%) and women returning to work (67% compared to 43%). Independent career professionals were slightly more likely to work with employees in an organisation they work for (34% compared to 29%) and much more likely to work with leadership/talent groups (27% compared to 8%) than NAEGA members.

**Figure 3: Background of clients**



Among the independent career professionals there was a roughly 50/50 split between those who only offer coaching/counselling services on career issues (52%) and those who offer other sorts of coaching or counselling as well (48%), while two-thirds of NAEGA members only offered coaching/counselling services on career issues.

Nearly everyone (97% of independent career professionals and 93% of NAEGA members) offered one-to-one counselling sessions with individual clients but more independent career professionals also ran workshops (85% compared to 69%) and offered psychological testing and assessment (55% compared to 22%). Just over a third of both groups offered other training/services as well.

## How do they work with individual clients?

### Single sessions or a series?

Nearly all the independent career professionals (97%) offered a series of consultations to individual clients but most (65%) also offered single consultations as well, while 14% of them also offered other services to individual clients. The vast majority (85%) of NAEGA members also offered a series of consultations and over half (53%) offered single consultations as well. Roughly one in five (21%) NAEGA members reported offering other services.

### Length of typical sessions

Most (67%) independent career professionals reported that individual sessions lasted between one and two hours with 22% reporting that they lasted less than an hour and a very few (3%) reporting that they lasted longer than two hours. 8% reported that session length varied a great deal.

NAEGA members typically offered shorter sessions with 66% reporting that a typical session lasted between 30 minutes and an hour with only 18% reporting having longer sessions, while 6% had typical sessions of less than 30 minutes.

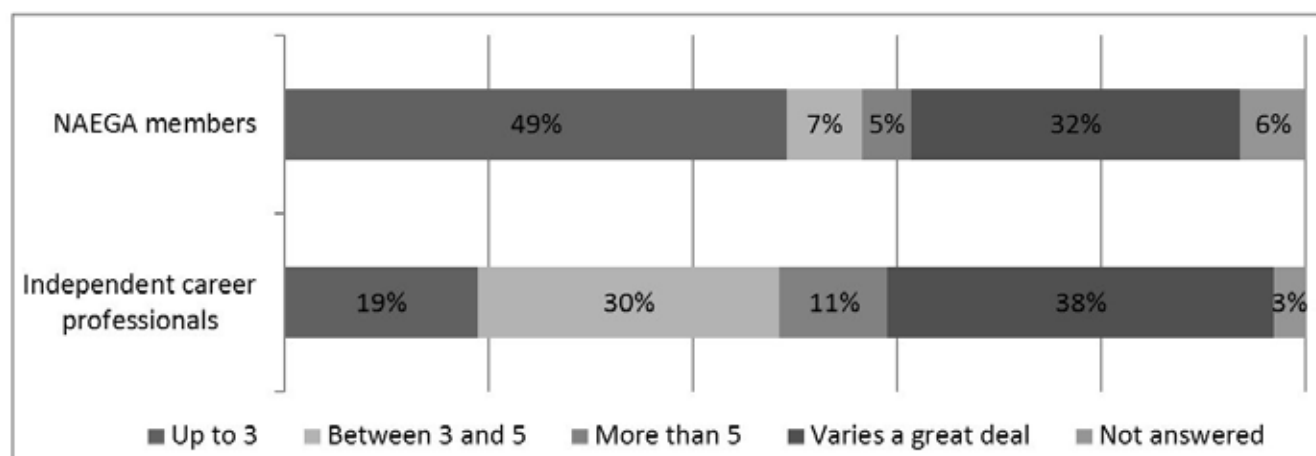
### How are services delivered to individuals?

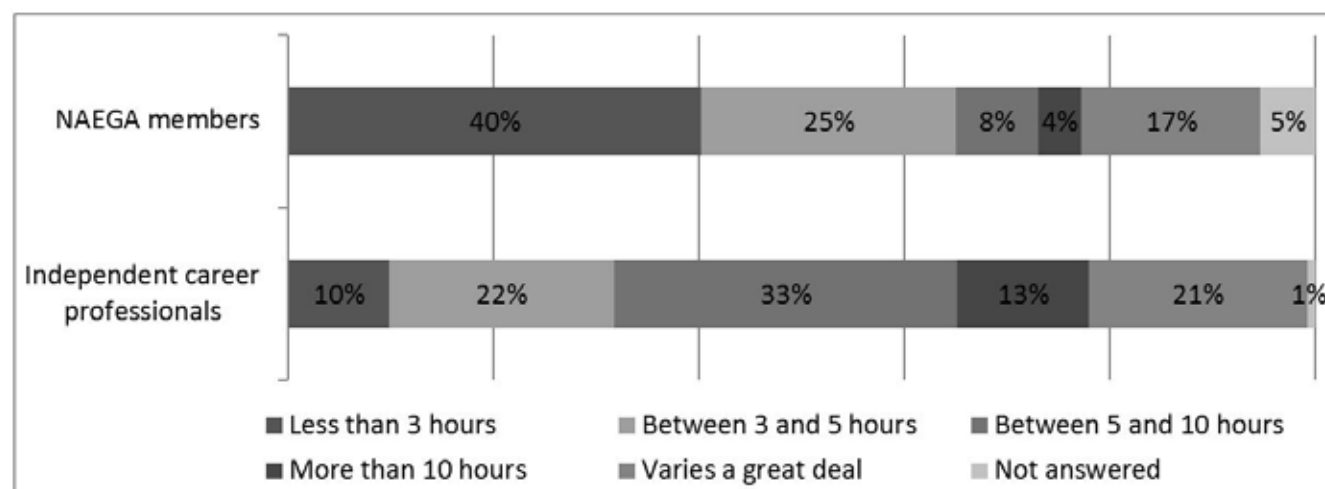
All independent career professionals and nearly all (92%) NAEGA members delivered services to individual clients face-to-face. However, independent career professionals were more likely to use the telephone/Skype (without video) (73% compared to 45%) or Skype with video/other video link (33% compared to 9%). Both groups used email extensively (64% of independent career professionals and 53% of NAEGA members). First meetings were usually face-to-face with telephone, Skype and email being used for follow-up sessions.

### Number of hours/sessions offered

It is probably not surprising that independent career professionals report spending more time and offering

**Figure 4: Typical number of sessions with an individual client**



**Figure 5: Typical number of total hours with an individual client**

more sessions to individual clients than NAEGA members who are frequently funded by government/the public either directly or indirectly (see Figures 4 and 5).

While around a third of both groups report that the number of sessions that they offer varies a great deal, nearly half (49%) of NAEGA members typically offer no more than three sessions, while 40% of independent career professionals offer more than three sessions. The difference is even more marked in terms of the number of hours spent with a typical client with 40% of NAEGA members spending less than three hours in total with an individual client and only 12% more than five hours. By way of contrast, a third of independent career professionals spend between five and ten hours with an individual client, 13% more than ten hours and only 10% less than three hours.

### Who pays?

How individual services are funded also varies considerably for the two groups. Employers (68%), schools, colleges or universities (11%) or a charity/voluntary organisation (5%) paid for some clients of independent career professionals but individuals themselves (63%) and parents/relatives (19%) also paid for individual sessions. On the other hand, two-thirds of NAEGA members were paid in other ways – usually by their employer, the National Careers Service or other public sector source.

## What about workshops?

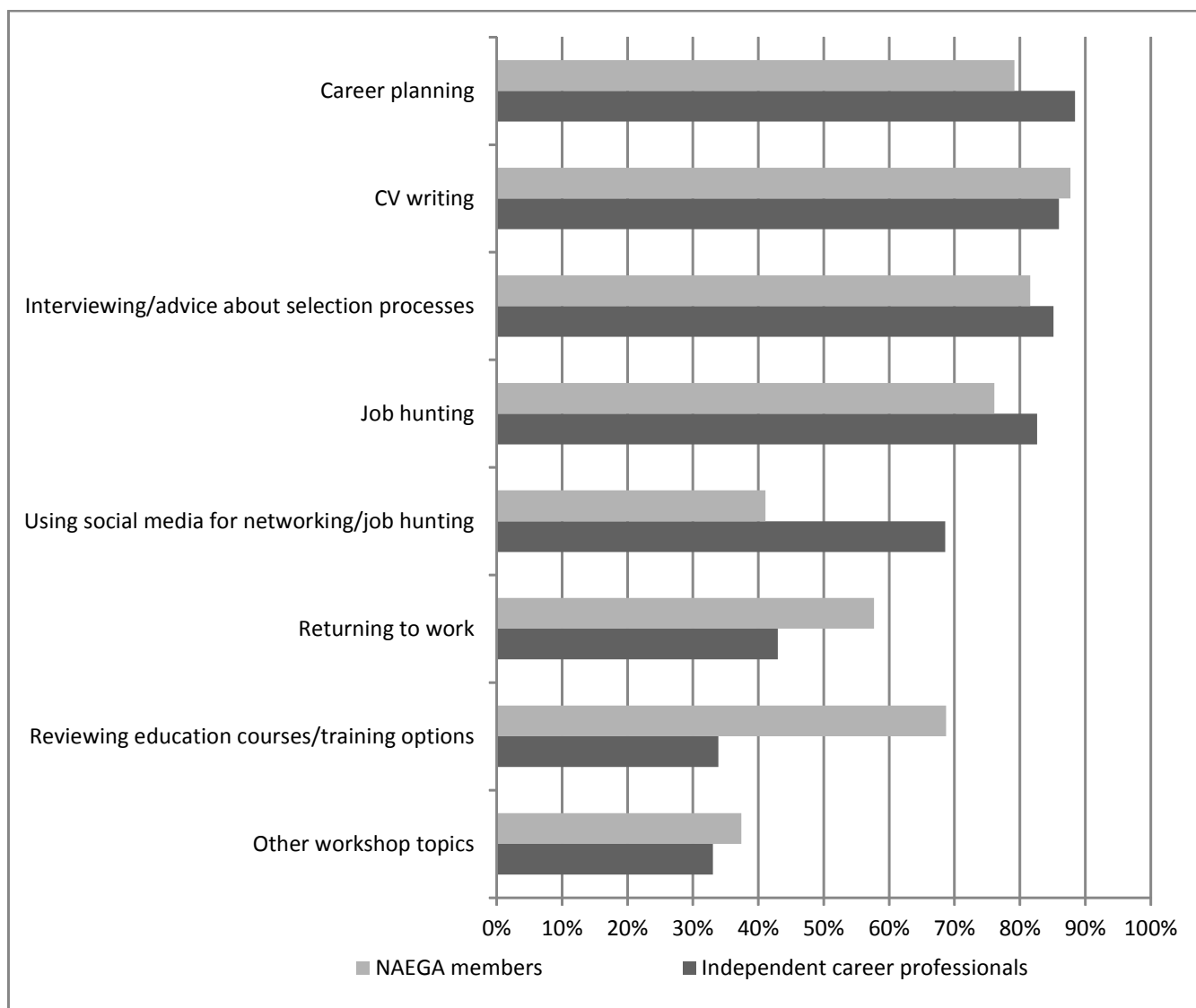
Nearly all (92%) independent career professionals and most (86%) NAEGA members listed the topics of workshops they ran. Most offered several topics – typically between four and six different topics. Figure 6 shows that the four most common topics for both groups were career planning, CV writing, interviewing/advice about selection processes and job hunting. Most (69%) independent career professionals also offered workshops on using social media for networking and job hunting, while NAEGA members were more likely to offer workshops on reviewing education courses/training options (69%) and returning to work (58%).

NAEGA members typically ran shorter workshops than independent career professionals. Nearly half (47%) of their workshops were less than two hours and a further 39% only lasted up to half a day. Workshops run by independent career professionals typically lasted up to half a day (42%) or a day (35%).

### How are workshops organised?

There were clear differences between the two groups in how workshops were organised and funded. Just under a third (32%) of independent career professionals reported that individual clients paid for some of their workshops. However, most were paid for by someone else – employers (65%), schools, colleges or universities (17%), or professional bodies/organisations (11%). In contrast, just over half (51%)



**Figure 6: Workshop topics**

the NAEGA members reported that their workshops were funded in other ways – mostly through public funds either directly or indirectly. A further 12% reported that their workshops were funded by schools, colleges or universities and 7% by their employers. Only 8% reported that individual clients pay for some of the workshops.

Although 37% of independent career professionals organised some workshops themselves, many more organised some of their workshops for others – employers for whom they provide services (39%), outplacement/career consultancies (30%) or their own employer (16%). Although a third of NAEGA

members reported that they organised workshops themselves, more (43%) were contracted by their employers to run workshops. NAEGA members were also contracted by professional bodies/organisations (17%), voluntary groups (14%), employers to whom they offer services (13%), and schools and colleges (12%). Interestingly, more (12%) independent career professionals reported being contracted by universities to run workshops than NAEGA members (3%).



## Conclusions

This survey has aimed to present an overview not only of the people working in these two sectors of the career profession but also to generate some insights into how they work. Ultimately a test of the value of the survey will be whether people working in the career sector recognise the picture that this survey provides of the people working in the profession and the nature of their work.

It has also highlighted similarities and differences in the way these two groups work. NAEGA members would appear to work with a more diverse set of clients but both groups offer a similar mix of activities. Although NAEGA members typically spend less time with their clients either individually or in workshops, this is almost certainly a result of how their services are funded.

It is clear that independent career professionals make more use of social media and new technology to attract and find clients, to deliver services and in the content of their provision, where using social media for networking and job hunting is a frequent workshop topic, for example. In contrast, it appears that NAEGA members are often running workshops to review education and training options. These differences at least in part will reflect the needs of their respective client groups.

It is striking that, although nearly all report having received specialist training, only a minority of both groups have a QCG/DipCG qualification. Many have other professional qualifications and it appears from the age profile that many in both groups have probably come to careers work after working in other related fields.

Most independent career professionals have never done careers work in the public sector, while in contrast most NAEGA members have (and many are currently). Although most NAEGA members were employed, most independent career professionals worked for themselves. The majority of independent career professionals and many NAEGA members also do other work alongside their career counselling/coaching. However, over half the independent career professionals were not working full-time, whereas

most NAEGA members were. Both these findings may indicate that some in both groups do not have as much work, and careers work in particular, as they would like. No doubt, however, some will have a preference for part-time working or for combining their career-related activities with work in other related fields.

Perhaps, most importantly this survey has highlighted the diversity of people, in terms of experience and backgrounds working in these sectors. While the survey cannot say anything about the quality of services being offered, there is no reason to think that clients are receiving poor services. One challenge for the career profession more generally is to celebrate this diversity. This means valuing the work of all groups regardless of their backgrounds and the clients they work with and sharing experiences, such as the use of new technology and social media, more widely across the profession. It also indicates the difficulty that the new UK professional body, the Career Development Institute, is going to have in accrediting qualifications.

## Limitations

It is difficult to assess how representative respondents to the survey were of people working in these two professional areas. Nevertheless, this survey by using a variety of routes to contact potential survey respondents achieved over 300 replies and this suggests that it has reached a significant proportion of its target audience.

The survey also only provides limited information about how services are funded, although it is clear that individual clients do pay for some services. In retrospect, it would have been useful, for example, to include a question that asked about the proportion of respondents' total fee income received from individual clients to help clarify further to what extent people are prepared to pay for career counselling.

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